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fantastic

SCIENCE FICTION

STAND ON THE EDGE OF SPACE AND LOOK INTO THE EYE OF A ROBOT

A LOGICAL RESOLUTION

WRITERS:
Gus Dallas
Romuald M. Tallip
C.R. Tanner
Kurt von Studkrad
Robert Stearns

ARTISTS: Carlson; Fabian; Mavor; Raven

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fantastic SCIENCE FICTION

Science Fiction ● Fantasy ● Sword & Sorcery

October, 1979

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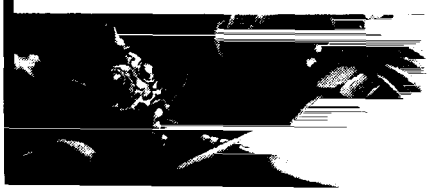
ABOUT THE COVER

Cover Illustration by Elinor Mavor interpets Robert Stearns' story, "A Logical Resolution," in this issue.



FEATURES

A FABIAN FEATURE **50**

A six-page Sword & Sorcery creation, continuing the adventures of Daemon. Written and illustrated by Steve Fabian especially for Fantastic.

FICTION

A LOGICAL RESOLUTION **14**
by Robert Stearns

Logic sometimes seems a cold and unfeeling way to deal with the affairs of men. Do the ends justify the means in this story?

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THE ONES THAT GOT AWAY **28**
by Gus Dallas

A humorous look at some futuristic "businessmen" and "businessbeings" who suffer from fierce competition even in the far reaches of outer space.

THE WIERD OF YOTHLANT HOLLOW **60**
by Romuald M. Tallip

A dark fantasy in the tradition of Clark Ashton Smith and H.P. Lovecraft.

TUMITHAK OF THE CORRIDORS **72**
by C. R. Tanner

A classic adventure in the heroic tradition, every bit as engrossing as in the day it was written.

POETRY

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INTO THE VALLEY OF DOOM

A rhyming tale of greed and dire consequences thereof. It could happen to any of us, in subtler ways, perhaps.

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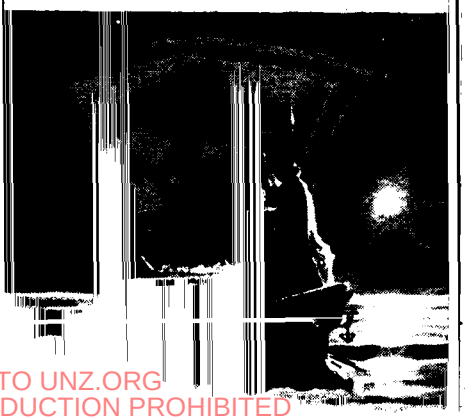
Science fact items of interest.

FAN FARE **11**
by James J. J. Wilson

A new column for SF fans, kicking off with general information, and slated to cover many topics in future issues.



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off the clipboard

WEBSTER DEFINES fantasy as the "free play of creative imagination." We have combed the piles of mail for the best examples of such mental gymnastics, and are very excited to present four new writers, each of whom will take you on an entertaining journey, light years away from the others in concept and form. There are some readers who profess to like only one kind of story or other - but we feel it can be far more stimulating to stretch, and taste from the myriad of fantastic notions that abound in the minds of these writers, who contact us from one end of the country to the other — and beyond.

So relax, and let your mind play with the ideas romping through these pages — ideas flavored with humor, pathos, adventure, evil, hope, courage and more.

A Logical Resolution, by *Robert Stearns* is a sensitive and poignant end-of-the-world story, featuring a robot named *Ten*, who will surprise you with his way of handling a seemingly impossible situation. This is *Stearns'* first published piece. For his reaction to an acceptance notice and some biographical notes, see *INTERCOM* (the first letter in that column.)

The Ones That Got Away, by *Gus Dallas* is a light-hearted "piracy" piece where everyone seems to have a little larceny in his soul. A feature writer for the New York Daily News, *Dallas* "resides in Queens with wife and wolf at the door that is allowed to sleep inside on inclement nights." He is a former Clevelander and this is his first published story.

The Wierd of Yothlant Hollow, by *Romuald M. Tallip* is a "dark fantasy, in the tradition of Clark Ashton Smith and H.P. Lovecraft"; a lyrical, occult adventure sure to please our fantasy afficiandos — and others who will be enticed into the tale upon reading the first few words. We are going to press before getting Tallip's biog, but we do know he is from Milwaukee and is the author of *The Daath Trilogy* which was published in the Cincinnati Journal of Ceremonial Magick.

Into the Valley of Doom, by *Kurt William von Stuckrad*, delivers an ominous message, in meter, about one of man's more futile traits. Our writer, successor to the title of an old German noble family, graduated from Wright State University in 1976 with a degree in Sociology. He is happily married to his college sweetheart; Sue, and enjoys writing SF and fantasy as a way to create alternate societies, "more interesting or more desirable than our own."

WE ARE also delighted to present the works of two artists new to the pages of *Fantastic*. The mind-bending illustrations by *Raven*, who pre-

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fers to interpret his subjects in surrealistic terms, are especially suited to the imagery conjured up in *The Wierd of Yothlant Hollow*. *Raven* is a freelance commercial illustrator, new to our genre, and a specialist in printmaking.

Bringing to life the remarkable characters in the timeless tale, *Tumithak of the Corridors*, is the work of Chris Carlson, a young, married art student who plans to continue his studies for awhile until pursuing a career in the commercial art world.

ANOTHER FABULOUS Fabian Feature graces our pages this month. Many asked to see more of his work so we thought six pages, written and illustrated by the masterful artist, would really blow your minds!

WE ALSO welcome to *Fantastic* a new general interest column for fans, *Fan Fare*, created by James J. J. Wilson of Hinsdale, Illinois. His first installment defines SF fandom and discusses conventions, fanzines, awards, etc. which should be helpful to those fans new to the ranks. Future columns will dig in deeper, covering these topics and more — including some book reviews and commentary about SF trends, movies and TV.

WRITER'S CORNER

WHEN WE said "plug in the typewriter" a few months back — we *unplugged* a deluge of writing that barely leaves us time to come up for air. Good *stuff*, too! If there weren't so much high caliber material flowing in, we'd be able to handle it quicker than we are. Our sincere apologies to any of you who have waited over two or three months to hear from us — you now know the reason. We really want to give everyone a fair shake, and it's just going to take time.

Also, many of you are still sending material to Ted White which is rerouted to our New York offices *and then* rerouted again to our editorial offices in Scottsdale. These manuscripts have all that foolishness to go through before we even have a chance to do our number on them!

We realize many of you had not seen recent copies of *Fantastic* or *Amazing* and so were unaware of the change in ownership, staff and address. Neither magazine has yet missed a publication date, so if you haven't seen it lately, ask about it at your favorite outlet. You can also ask at your local distributor. Demand will be noted.

Those of you who sign off with "sitting in anguish awaiting your reply," "waiting with bated breath," "chewing nails up to elbows" and "here on pins and needles" have our heartfelt sympathy — we *know* how anxious you feel. But as much a tug on the old strings as we feel — the story will stand or fall on its own merits.

WHO ARE the folks behind all those typewriters? Students, teachers, professors, P.H.D.'s, architects, medical doctors, secretaries (even an embassy press secretary), carpenters, newspaper reporters, a music therapist (Robert Stearns who wrote *"A Logical Conclusion"*) and even one guy who claims to be from outer space.

We salute you, one and all.

A GOOD response is coming in from people with ideas for columns which we intend to develop for both *Fantastic* and *Amazing*. Under consideration now (and possibly to be included in these latest issues) are a

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film review column; two different fandom columns (one which would alternate news with reprints of some of the best stories from the fanzines); SF history; a science fact column; and a lecture/discussion series from a teacher who conducts a class about *"The Future."* Let us know what you think about these, and send us any other ideas you may have.

THE OVERALL reaction to our *New Directions* has been favorable. One critic told us to shape up to his way of doing things or "die," but generally, the mail has been helpful and constructive — much as we hoped it would be. This has made it easier to work toward our goal of keeping most of you happily entertained, most of the time. We hope you notice how many new stories we are beginning to present. It is directly related to our call for new writers, who are responding in big numbers and high style.

We appreciate everyone's interest very, very much.

THE NEWSSTANDS are featuring many science fiction anthologies, and many paperbacks, as well as hardcover books are featuring collections of the best SF stories. But, nothing has been published to compare with our *GRAB BAG* offer! *It is the largest SF anthology ever offered.* Every big name author is represented in its *1024 pages.* Made up of eight issues of *Amazing* and *Fantastic,* the anthology is a random assortment (no specific issue), and costs only $5.00 (plus $1.00 for mailing). Send $6.00 to *GRAB BAG,* Box 157, Purchase, N.Y. 10577

WE NOTE that many SF magazines feature interviews with famous authors. It occurred to us that many of our readers, too, are thoughtful and interesting — perhaps even famous, and would be good subjects for an interview feature of our own. If you would like to be heard, send us your thoughts about SF in general, its literature, films, future — whatever thoughts you have on the subject. From the letters submitted, we will choose someone to interview. So, write us, send a short biog., a small photo and you may be on your way to appearing on our pages as *SF Reader-of-the Month.*

WRITER'S GUIDELINES

Submit manuscripts typewritten, double-spaced, proofread and unfolded with self addressed, stamped envelope. SF and fantasy up to 9,000 words. Payment, 1 to 2 cents per word upon publication.

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Here we go again with the "Voice of the People." Undoubtedly, there is a silent majority out there who never say a word — but who support us nonetheless. Meantime, everyone can enjoy a sampling from those inclined to share their feelings. We appreciate your letters tremendously.

Dear Mr. Bernhard,

I have enclosed the requested pink copy with my signature regarding the publication of my story "Logical Resolution." Included in this letter is also the biographical sketch that was asked for.

When I rushed to inform my friends I had published my first story, each exclaimed: *"Fantastic!"* "Yes, October issue," I replied. "How did you know?" I am 24 and have just completed an internship at Norristown, State Hospital, Pennsylvania, as a music therapist. I was in fact born in Pennsylvania, though Rochester, N.Y. is where I've spent most of my existence. Though I originally went to the University of Miami to become a composer, I switched to music therapy as a pursuit better designed for my abilities. While attending the University I wrote a humor column for its *Hurricane* newspaper. With the internship's conclusion, I now have my degree and find myself in the Rod Serling Reruns between school and finding a job to begin earning a living while there is still something left of the economy. However, writing remains my central priority and I take great pride and pleasure in this acceptance. I've got other short stories on the stove, so I hope this is the beginning of a long and very *Fantastic* association.

Rober M. Stearns
Rochester, New York

Keep on cookin'!

Mr. White: *or should I say Gohagen?*

My God, what your magazine is doing. I am impressed and excited, indeed.

You've even managed to somehow kindle some of the old spark into Tom Disch, bringing him back from the rarefied planes he's been on, putting back a little of the old ease and charm.

Not that I don't like his other stuff. It's just good to see him have fun.

I read your publisher's statement. How can you survive? I feel horribly guilty that I can't send the money for a subscription, but I don't have such a massive lump sum at the moment. It seems you could use some more newsstand sales anyway, and you can definitely count of me there.

Even if some of it wasn't perfect. I found the end of *Ooops*, for example,

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a little disappointing. We get the impression that all of this is happening in some other time frame, where a mere glance through a rift takes weeks, yet the moron's voice is perfectly intelligible, or at least the final quote implies that. We are asked to overlook that, and the amazing coincident factor of his speaking English, and the transmission of sound through a vacumn. A bit much, maybe.

I know humor allows for great departures from the mundane, but why do it when it could have just as well ended in the following more lucid and consistent manner:

On the sixth day it was apparent the face was showing a look of dumb surprise.

On the seventh, its mouth opened. By 11 a.m. it looked as if it were blowing a bubble. By 2 it was forming a plosive, and by 5 its mouth was open again.

That evening, Newscasters all over the world were letting the public in on what expert linquists and lipreaders agreed the face had to be saying. There was no doubt about it. He was saying:

"Ooops."

Quickly, etc.

Miss Orr's story was a typical turnabout, but a surprise nonetheless.

It's been a long time since I've seen this kind of cosmic screwiness in SF, and I have missed it indeed. When you say your magazine could be the training ground for a new level of SF writing, I believe you're right. It has the looseness, the margin for error, and the open attitude that could bring it about. Once more it is the literature of ideas, open to experiment.

I was beginning to think it wasn't possible, but who expected the Beatles in the waning years of Rock and Roll? Thank you.

D.M. North
San Jose, California

P.S. Boy, do I feel silly. I just read the copyright dates. Not your fault. No wonder. But I do admire the attitude of those days. I am disappointed to see though, that poor old Tom didn't write that story recently. For a minute. there . . .

I don't mean to put you off. But it did let a little of the air out of my sails.

Do you think it would be possible to get new stories that reflect that kind of imagination and irreverence? Is that the plan? Or do you want to do mostly reprints?

Keep it up, whatever. I liked it.

If you do go to more new stories, all will be forgiven.

I hope you care.

We care a lot. We are searching for more of everything you liked — and especially the same kind of imagination, irreverence, experimentation, etc. in new pieces of fiction. We have some beautiful samples in this issue — please let us know how you like our new authors' efforts. It is not our purpose to stick with older stories — only to present you the best entertainment we have on hand at the time. Our inventory of exciting new fiction is growing, happily! It is still nice to read some of those "golden oldies" though, and many readers have never seen them. Thanks for your alternate ending to Ooops, although we never gave a thought to the probabilities involved in this "chuckler."

Dear Fantastic Staff:

You are causing a stir in the SF-Fantasy world.

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In my travels among the fans of this special world (conventions, etc.) I often hear you being discussed. The opinions of your "new directions" range from "abysmal" to "fantastic," with dollops of everything in between, spicing up the stew.

The important thing to note, I believe, is that you are being noticed, you are innovative, attractive and no matter what else — no one can say you're not trying!

Count me a fan.

Sincerely,
E.M. Johnson
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Mr. Bernhard,

We were delighted with the July issue of *Fantastic*, and not merely because "Hessie" (and those wonderful illustrations) held the number-one spot. Thanks for the check and for the favored position!

There is a story I'd like to see reprinted, and one I've never seen in an anthology: "Merlin's Ring." I read it in 1950, I think, and still remember it with a chuckle. Don't recall the author or the magazine that published it, but I do remember that another story in the same issue has been frequently anthologized — concerning the fisherman who incurred the wrath of a water spirit, was cursed and could not bathe, shave or drink water (only beer) until he made proper obeisance. Any chance that with such slight clues you could be giving your readers a chance to enjoy the story?

Jean Fark
Escondido, California

Thanks for the good cheer. We felt good about it, too. We ask our readers to help identify and locate the stories you mention. We'll give a look through our past issues, too.

Dear Sirs:

YES, your April issue is *Fantastic!* Captures the spirit of Classic SF, which I thought had been lost. Most contemporary fiction is mired in contemporary concerns, like reading the morning newspaper. No doubt such literature has its place, but Science Fiction is SUPPOSED to be different. It is not just scientific, future oriented, or strange. It appeals to the reader whose interests range beyond accepted perceptions and assumptions.

It is also supposed to be fun, and not mired in a depressing view of the universe.

Each story in this issue is very good. Each gives no internal clue to the date of its origin, though from the fine print I note they span a period from 1936 to present. I note also from the fine print your authors will be writing for love and not money.

I heartily endorse the editorial direction you outline on page 4. Please continue along those lines. My subscription order is enclosed.

Robert L. Shuler, Jr.
Friendswood, Texas

Thanks for your vote of confidence. We hope to grow and grow so we all can have both the love and the money — but first things first!

Dear Mr. Gohagen:

I was pleased and enthused with Mr. Arthur Bernhard's 'New Direc-

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tions' editorial of the April, 1979 issue. I am only fond of the now-fading New Wave SF for its consistent craftsmanship; I think that sort of skill could be better employed by improving the quality of the Golden Age genres — most of the past masters of science fiction had an ability to intrigue and entertain beyond any interest generated in the (admittedly, more lyric and considered) pieces of the New Wave writers. It would be nice if *Fantastic* could bring about a blend of the new lyricism and the old plotting skills.

I enjoyed the new *Fantastic*, and hope for more of the same.

Nick O'Donohoe
New Hampton, Iowa

We agree with you about New Wave SF. In order to remain vital, every medium of expression needs experimentation by those brave or rebellious souls willing to tempt fate and break from tradition. The art world had Impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism, Pop Art, Happenings, etc. New Wavers rocked SF's boat and paved the way for some fresh new ideas. If much of their work was obscure by traditional standards, it, indeed, pressed on to a new level of literary style, good for the entire genre. Blending the best of both eras certainly would be the best idea.

Dear Sir,

I was delighted to find *Fantastic* (and *Amazing*) back on the stands after quite an interval during which, I gloomily surmised that another SF/Fantasy had bit the dust. I was also not a little heartened at the new format and above all, the new masthead. I sincerely wish you the best with it. We need it, not only as a market and proving grounds for new writers, but as a source of delight for many readers.

John Brizzolara
Brooklyn, New York

Thank you, John, for your comments and your manuscript, which is under consideration. You mentioned you were glad to see our publications back on the stands. Since many readers have made similar remarks about fearing that Amazing or Fantastic had folded, we want to clear the air; no issue has missed publication. If you do not find copies at your usual outlet, ask the proprietor if he will get some for you. The more demand, the more copies will be distributed to your outlet — but, you must speak up. If your friendly storekeeper can't secure the magazine you want, go to your local distributor; he will also note if there is a demand for a particular publication. We have been increasing all distribution these last few months, and more people will be finding Amazing and Fantastic at their favorite outlets.

Omar,

I just read the article on black holes in your April issue and enjoyed it tremendously. For its size, it was a fairly complete outline of black holes which, in my opinion, could be improved (from its present state of excellence). Early in my studies of cosmology I discovered a fact that could have added a great deal to "What is a Black Hole?": The present model of a black hole has orbiting in an *ergosphere*, a ring of radiant light emanating between the *stationary*

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limit and the *event horizon*. What interested me most about the ergosphere was that light continuously flowed in photon clouds throughout this celestial donut.

I am currently pursuing a doctorate in astronomy. Astronomy, cosmology and cosmogony have all interested me for years, and for some time now I've been writing science fiction, which is also high on my list of obsessions. In the near future you will be receiving several manuscripts (in separate envelopes, of course) that were completed no earlier than January of this year. You have doubtlessly felt the first wave of stories that writers the world over have tucked away for eons.

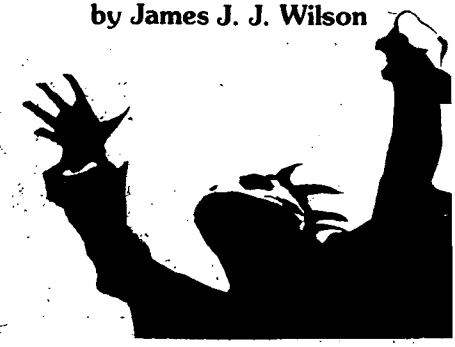
If you are interested I can begin immediately on a series of science articles dealing with astronomy, cosmology, *ad infinitum* (or almost so) for *Fantastic*. Since I hate unnecessary technical back talk I would use a style agreeable to everyone: to you, to me and most importantly of all, the readers of *Fantastic*.

Mark Shepherd
Tulsa, Oklahoma

We are interested as you know by now. It's fun to let our readers know how it goes behind the scenes, since so many of them are also aspiring performers. And, we are delighted to print the additional information about black holes for our readers.

FAN FARE

by James J. J. Wilson



WHILE THERE are as many definitions for Science Fiction (or SF) as there are readers, the same is true in defining fandom. First of all, we must find out what a fan is. Unlike one who is primarily just a reader of SF, a fan spends quite a bit of time engaged in various related and unrelated activities such as corresponding with writers and other *fen*, joining clubs and discussion groups, writing and publishing *fanzines* (magazines written by and for other fans and containing news, articles, interviews, etc. While most have extremely small circulations, some have readerships in the thousands), and attending SF conventions. Many fans spend more time engaged in these activities than they spend reading SF.

Another interesting aspect about SF *fen* is that they have such a wide spectrum of interests: a SF fan may spend his time collecting books, magazines, artwork, autographs; he or she may belong to a "fringe" group devoted to a specific TV show, or

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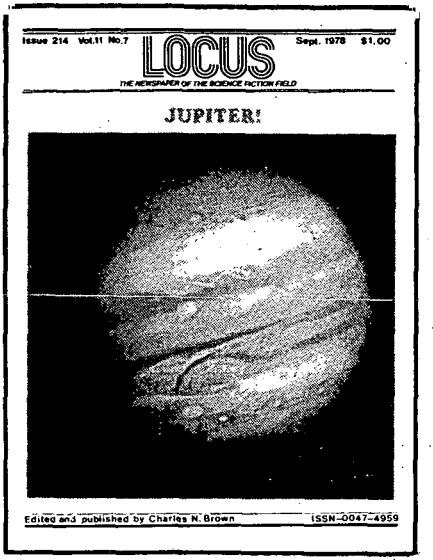
author, or series; or he may just enjoy meeting people and discussing future society and technology.

A particularly unique quirk about SF *fen* is that they are compulsive letter-writers. They write to writers, other *fen*, and magazine editors. As a matter of fact, many believe the origins of fandom can be traced back to the letters column in *Weird Tales* in the early 1920s and in Hugo Gernsback's *Amazing Stories* in the late 1920s. It was also Hugo Gernsback who founded the first major SF club — The Science Fiction League, in the mid 1930s.

One of the main forums for SF fen is the *fanzines*, which are magazines written and published by fen. Most fanzines have irregular publication schedules, are very cheaply printed, have very small circulations, and usually don't last very long. There are, of course, a few notable exceptions. Two of the best are *Science Fiction Review* and *Locus*. Both are professionally printed, have circulations in the thousands, and have been published regularly for many years.

Science Fiction Review and its editor/publisher, Richard E. Geis, have been awarded a total of ten "Hugos," the highest award in SF, which is more than anyone else in SF except for Kelly Freas, who also has ten. Each issue contains book reviews, interviews with major SF writers, articles by prominent SF critics and writers, and a large portion of news and commentary by Dick Geis, one of SF's best and most interesting fan writers. *Science Fiction Review* is published four times a year and is available from Richard E. Geis, P.O. Box 11408, Portland, OR 97211.



Locus is known as "The Newspaper of the Science Fiction Field". Each issue is packed with news about writers, publishers, conventions, financial deals, upcoming books, conventions, and often features book reviews and columns by prominent authors. *Locus* is read by most professionals in the field, is published monthly and is available from Box 3938, San Francisco, CA 94119.

Another indispensable publication is *Science Fiction and Fantasy Book Review*. Only in its first year of publicatin, it includes valuable reviews of practically every SF and Fantasy book currently available. It is published monthly by Borgo Press, P.O. Box 2845, San Bernadino, CA 92406.

One of the many enjoyable activities in fandom is attending SF conventions. The smaller conventions are attended by hundreds of fen from a particular area, while the annual *World Science Fiction Convention* is attend-

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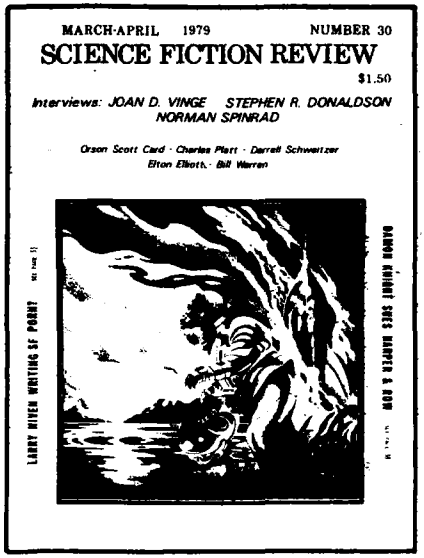
MARCH-APRIL 1979 NUMBER 30
SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW
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Interviews: JOAN D. VINGE STEPHEN R. DONALDSON
NORMAN SPINRAD
Orson Scott Card · Charles Platt · Darrell Schweitzer
Elton Elliott · Bill Warren
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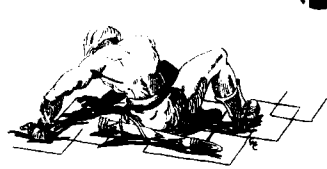
RANDOM HOUSE SEES MURDER IN BOOK

ed by thousands from around the world. Conventions usually consist of panel discussions by professionals, speeches, movies, parties, art exhibits, and a "huckster's room" in which people buy, sell and trade books, magazines and various other treasured items. Members of the *World Science Fiction Convention* nominate and vote on the *Science Fiction Achievement Awards* which are popularly referred to as the "Hugo" Awards in honor of Hugo Gernsback. These are considered by many to be the highest awards in the field, although some feel more prestige may accompany the Nebula Award given by the membership of the *Science Fiction Writers of America*. The *World Science Fiction Convention* is held every year over Labor Day weekend, and in 1979 will be in Brighton, England. Anyone who is unable to attend the convention can purchase a supporting membership which entitles them to all the progress reports, the convention program book, and the right to participate in "Hugo" voting. For the 1979 convention, memberships are $15 *attending* and $7.50 *supporting*, to be sent to SEACON, c/o Tony Lewis, Box 429, Natick, MA 01760. The 1980 convention will be held in Boston. For information write to NOREASCON TWO at P.O. Box 46, MIT Branch Post Office, Cambridge, MA 02139.

While many cannot attend the *World Convention* because of geographic difficulties, virtually anyone in the United States can easily attend a local convention or fan club. If you don't know of any clubs or other SF fen in your area and you would like to find some, $6 sent to Janie Lamb, Route 2, Box 272, Heiskell, TN 37754 will buy you a year's membership in the *National Fantasy Fan Federation* who will inundate you with information on clubs, fen and activities, and will send you several interesting publications. A less expensive but less efficient method would be to watch the letters column in this and other magazines for fen in your area.

We hope this has been an informative column and that a few of you will become devoted SF fen because of it. Remember that practically all the professional SF authors started out as SF readers and SF fen. Future installations will be more comprehensive, covering various topics in greater depth. Also, remember that your comments and suggestions sent c/o the editor will be greatly appreciated.



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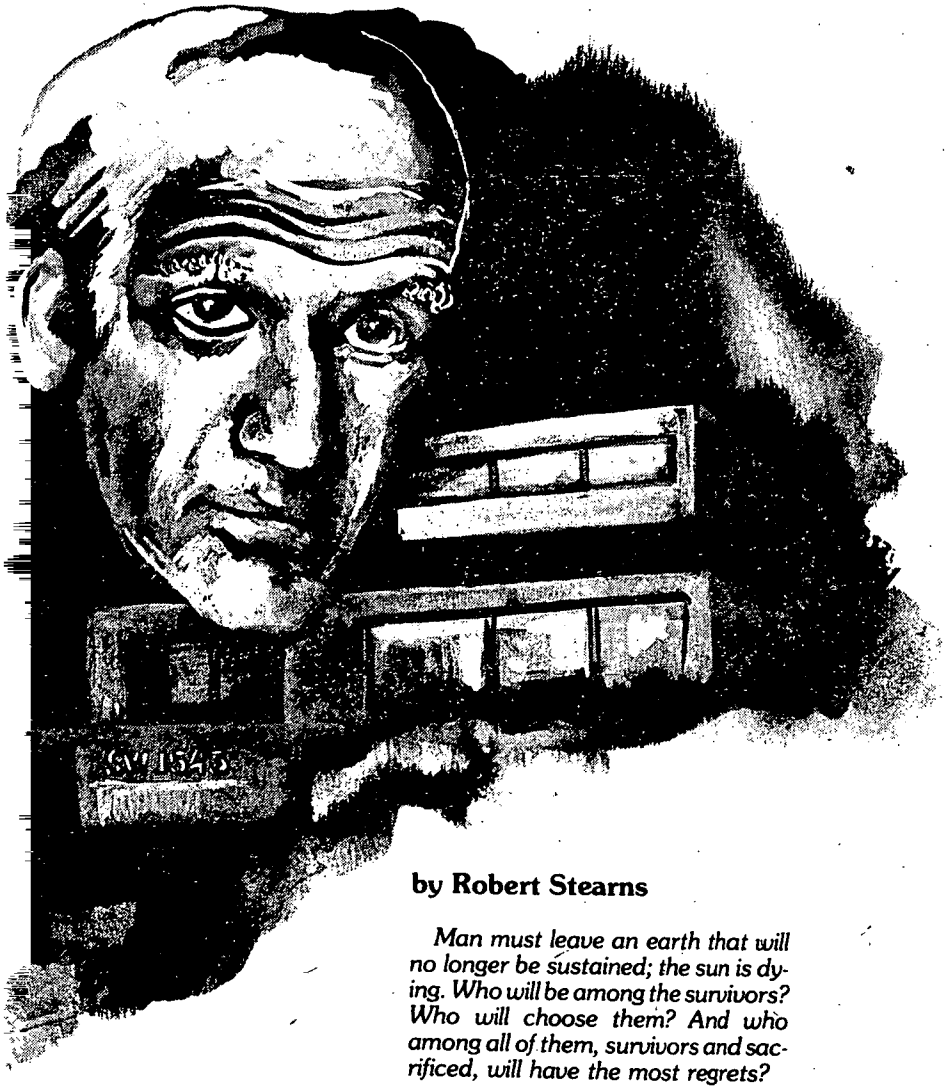

by Robert Stearns

Man must leave an earth that will no longer be sustained; the sun is dying. Who will be among the survivors? Who will choose them? And who among all of them, survivors and sacrificed, will have the most regrets?

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Warm and soft breezes fed into the antarctic valley, massaging young trees and gifting the new soil with spores. To Father Ray Simmal, the view was soothing in this morning light. Given more time, the valley would grow into even greater beauty.

More time.

Father Simmal's gray eyebrows lowered, rerouting some of the lines in his long, craggy features.

No tears, old Cross-Waver. The time for crying is done.

"Good morning, Father."

Simmal did not turn around. "Hello, Ten."

He lit a cigarette.

"You should cease smoking, Father. You will not be allowed to on the ship."

"Then let me enjoy it while I can."

"It would be best if you cut down now. I am worried about you, Father. You eat less, sleep less; you smoke and drink more."

Simmal's lips went crookedly upward. "*I'm* the one you're concerned with?"

"Yes."

"At this time tomorrow, I'll be alive and well. So will you — if 'life' is an appropriate term. But certain others won't be. Yet I'm the focus of your worry. How interesting."

"I have explained to you before," said Ten, "that I resolved the situation logically at the time of the decision. To experience the disorientation that you and the other staff members display would be pointless."

"I see. Ten, do you know the ancient tale 'The Wizard of Oz?'"

"Yes."

"You're like the Tin Woodsman. Except in reverse."

"I do not understand."

Simmal did a sluggish about-face, and let his gaze encompass Ten: golden body, two sets of arms, vaguely human countenance carved in what now seemed a mocking serenity.

"He was a robot who thought he didn't have a heart and searched for one, only to find out he had one all along. You supposedly had one and seemed to lose it — because you *never really had one* in the first place."

"I regret you feel that way."

"No. You can't regret anything. You are cold and programmed as this society that also 'regrets' its pronouncement. But that doesn't make things easier. It doesn't at all."

"Will cigarettes and liquor assist?"

"They can't hurt. As you say, I'll have to quit smoking tomorrow. And I know how to control my intake; I was counseling alcoholics while you were still nothing but ore. Now get out of my sight!"

Ten rose centimeters off the ground, turned and began to float off.

Father Simmal abruptly

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grimaced, held up a hand. "No. Wait."

Ten came to a hover.

"Listen, I'm sorry." Yes, the time for senseless anger is done, too. "Are the arrangements for the picnic made?"

"I am going to take care of the final details now."

"Excellent. I'll be along shortly . . . please understand, Ten. I'm the way I am. I'll try not to blame you for what you are."

"It's all right, Father. You are correct in assuming I am an entity of programming, not emotion. Is there anything else you wish?"

Simmal shook his head.

"Then I will see you."

Ten sped off.

Father Simmal returned to regarding the valley. When he finished the cigarette, he stamped it out with unintended savagery. He had another lit as he began walking in Ten's direction.

The multi-winged, twelve-story building called the Facility soon loomed before him, throwing back the incessant brilliance of the sky's hellball in a dozen glares. (Medical Facility SW-1543. SW-1543! Whatever happened to the Horizon Houses? The New Light Centers?) He entered, took the tube to his office. Empty tape-shelves. Empty drawers. He sat down at his desk, lighting still another cigarette. There was a knock on the door.

"Come in."

Two men entered: the one on the right wore sleeveless coveralls on his short, chubby frame — he had a wide mouth, small black eyes and dark hair that seemed to cling to his cheeks; the other one was tall and slender with receding white hair, a handsome countenance, blue eyes and a silver uniform set to a moderate glow.

"Hi, Ray," the short one greeted the Father.

"Hello, Vil."

"Pleasant morning, Father Simmal."

"Hello, Director Quenn. Please be seated."

Vil Capraccio grinned. "I'm all through at Starport, and when the Director said he was coming here, I hitched a ride," his grin diminishing. "Thought you could use the company."

"I appreciate that, Vil. Director?"

"Well," Quenn said, "I've arrived to supervise the closing of the Facility. I'm sure you realized that."

" 'Closing of the Facility'?"

Quenn chuckled. "Yes, I suppose that is a bit of an understatement."

"Would genocide be an overstatement?"

Capraccio looked pained. "Ray —"

"I Hope we aren't going to start this all over —" Quenn interrupted . . .

The Council was convened and facing Father Simmal as

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Quenn addressed them over the microphone:

". . . Adhere, then, to our humanistic policy. Convicted criminals and high-level patients will be allowed to go. However, the patient population of SW-1543 is incompetent, requiring constant care and services that our medical sections would be unable to provide. It is the Council's decision, then, that these patients regrettably not be with the Voyage. We recommend euthanasia as the most merciful course of action."

"Monsters!" screamed Simmal. "No — more accurately: Armags! Yes, the cave-skulking preachers of suicide and hatred haven't been eliminated after all. They're still among us, calling themselves humanists!"

"Father," said line-faced Director Reegas, "be reasonable. The frontiers of space and a new world to settle will bring hardships to the healthiest of us, let alone individuals so mentally or neurologically dysfunctioning that they can't dress and feed themselves. Now then, if we were truly cold, it would have been decided to take only personnel whose professions were directly related to the task at hand. As you've seen, that isn't the case. So weary old men like you and I will travel with the rest. But it simply can't be everybody."

"A policy is a policy," stated Simmal. "We 'weary old men' might as well be butchered 'mercifully' too."

Reegas sighed. "You still don't understand —"

"I only understand that history is filled with the abuses of the 'mad'; they have been consistently portrayed as 'wicked' and 'weird' when actually the ways they've been treated can be described with far less complimentary adjectives. And now you ask me to condone this final ugliness."

Quenn said, "We don't request you condone, just cooperate. Now then, to continue, SW-1543 will be allowed to function for one more year, until the very day of departure."

"Only a year?"

"Correct. That's the margin of safety scientists give us. We dare wait no further."

"Intolerable!" Simmal burst. "You sin against God!"

Director Malthus, who had not spoken since the meeting began, said, "I assume this God, if He exists, is the one responsible for preparing to blow up our sun. During this preparation He has caused roasted continents, boiling oceans and the resulting insanity that has caused, in turn, terrifying wars and the deaths of billions. Tell me, Father, is there also such a thing as God sinning against Man?"

"FATHER, MUST we go through all this again?"

"No. It would serve little purpose."

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Quenn smiled, somewhat relieved, then looked deeply concerned. "I understand your feelings. This isn't easy for any of us. We *all* put a high value on human life."

"Indeed? Then why is a robot going while 'valuable human life' is being extinguished?"

"You mean Ten. Sorry, Father, but you know a piece of equipment like Ten is indispensable, especially with so few like him still functioning. After all, he — well, you're the robot expert, Vil."

"Been awhile since I worked in that area," Capraccio said, "but I'm afraid he's right, Ray. The Risendon model is probably the most advanced ever created, and there's no one left who knows how to create them anymore. Ten can perform a host of different functions that we need desperately."

". . . Constructs and maintains houses, transports materials and even people long distances in seconds, is self-repairing, and able to do all this in the most hostile of conditions. Of course, you won't have need of these skills, but I think this gives you an idea of the Risendon's capacity."

Simmal was skeptical. "Why offer me a robot that can do all that? Surely he'd be better off as a carpenter or some such thing."

The salesman's smile did not decrease. "Ah, but that's what makes the Risendon unique. Its intelligence level is so close to that of a person that each robot has subtle but definite differences in aptitude, just like us. Tests are given to determine what these are; plus, the robot is actually 'asked' what areas he'd like to work in. Ten, here, came out strongest — and chose to work — in theology and mental health. Didn't you, Ten?"

The robot answered, "I am very interested in both, and desire greatly to work with you, Father Simmal."

Simmal considered. "Well . . . I suppose we could try it for awhile . . ."

QUENN GLANCED at his chron. "At any rate, Father, we must get on with this. If you will look over these and sign them, we can discuss the details of tomorrow morning . . ."

After papers, signing, discussion and Quenn's "Good day," Capraccio remained.

"Well," he said, "you seem to be holding up okay. Are you?"

"I believe so. My bags are packed and the rent's paid."

"You sound pretty bitter. I guess I don't blame you."

"I'm past bitterness. Resigned is more like it — though I refuse to show willing acceptance. Which is why Ten's behavior so unnerves me."

"Yes, I was going to ask you about that. In the years you two have worked together, I never

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saw a problem. What has caused one now?"

Simmal agreed, "Yes, we were indeed close. His ceaseless dedication, care and warmth to the patients have always been undeniable. No one watching him could say: 'Here is a cold machine at work.' When the decision was made I thought he would fall into pieces. Instead, it's business as usual."

"Are you disappointed that he *didn't* fall into pieces?"

"When you put it that way, no. But," his faint smile giving way to a puzzled frown, "I always thought that robots have one priority over their own existence and even over human commands: human life. They can't kill nor allow life to be taken. Therefore, Ten *should* have broken down."

"Uh-huh, and a lesser robot would have done precisely that. Life can't be taken, no matter what. Ten, however, sees things in broader terms. He understands the consequences of attempting to rescue everyone in this crisis; he knows that what is being done is because there's simply no other option."

" 'I have resolved the situation logically,' is what he says."

"And he has. But don't think it wasn't painful for him. In fact, despite his high level, I'm actually surprised he's done so well."

"Then you're saying it's really more than an algebra problem to him; that, in his own way, he suffers like the rest of us."

Capraccio tossed up his wrists. "You've got it. You see, the Risendon was still new when the Announcement came. So there was never an opportunity to test its full potential. But the way he's come through this mess is a better test than any I can think of. And Ten graduates with honors. His behavior, then, is a tribute to his great strength, not limitations." Abrupt grin. "Feel better?"

"Lovely. I'm relieved to find out someone is in pain after all."

His grin fading, "Then you at least understand."

"Oh, I do, Vil. And I appreciate it. Yes, what you say makes sense. I suppose I should be more sympathetic. It's the least I can do at this point."

Capraccio nodded. "The least anybody could. The sooner we're off 'mother' Earth, the better. Then you'll be fine. And," he added, "you won't spend your last night here alone. I was wondering if —"

"I'd be more than happy to have you, Vil. I wouldn't relish a solitary evening after this final working afternoon."

THE TABLES were ready, the food set up and several hundred individuals brought out. There was Orson, who put literally anything in his mouth and consistently whispered to imaginary voices. There was Ella, in her eighties and frequently informing everyone that she had to go home and fix dinner for her husband — neglect-

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ing to recall he'd been dead twenty years. Arnick came in his motorized chair, a fifth of his head missing due to surgery following a sniper's shot. Trania busied herself wiping things meticulously clean with her sleeves, oblivious to her occasional lack of bladder control. Woldar was retarded but had enough imagination to believe that spiders crawled in and out of his head. Simmal reminded him to tell them to go away. Woldar did, and reported with relief — as always — that they obeyed.

They were guided to their places by the staff, Simmal's pride and joy. No matter what happened with this suffering group of humanity, it deterred no nurse's smile, no aide's tasks, no therapist's unlimited dedication. They cleaned accidental spills, played games and did reality orientation as though this was any outing. Arnick fingerpainted with his working hand; Ella partipated in the sing-along. The behavior and cooperation were exceptionally good, almost as if they knew . . .

And you, Ten. Also cleaning, playing and orienting with equal efficiency. I have been told you hurt too, but why do I still not sense this? Have I grown that cold? Or is it simply that mask of a face preventing anyone from witnessing your private anguish?

"Father!"

Simmal saw Farl, one of the aides, come hurrying toward him, leading Woldar by the hand. Simmal wearily braced himself. Yes, it would be Farl. Young and oversensitive Farl.

"Father, wait'll you hear this!" He turned to Woldar. "Okay, Woldar. Start. The *whole* alphabet."

For the next minute Woldar went haltingly through almost half. He was encouraged by constant enthusiastic adjectives from Farl.

Then he stopped, looked uncertain, frightened.

"Come *on*, Woldar," Farl said. "You were doing very well. Keep going!"

Woldar abruptly clutched his bald head. "The spiders! The spiders are here!"

"Forget the frigging spiders! The next letter is 'Q!' Say it! 'Q'!"

Woldar continued to clutch. "They're all over! Spiders!"

Farl grabbed his shoulders. "I said *forget them! Say the letter!*"

"Farl," Simmal said quietly.

Farl turned and said hurriedly, "He did it before, Father! Believe me! The entire thing, no kidding!" He touched Simmal's forearm. "You've got to tell the Council!"

"And what should I tell it?"

"That Woldar has improved, of course! He can be put with the higher levels, and he can go with us. He *can*, Father!"

"Farl," Simmal said, "that's only for those who can at least care for themselves. Woldar has trouble with this."

"But he can do the alphabet!" said Farl, going to his knees. "The whole Jesus alphabet."

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Simmal began helping him up. "Come on. You'd better go back."

Ten sped over. "Can I assist, Father?"

"Yes, thank you, Ten. Could you take Farl to —"

Farl suddenly lashed a kick which Ten avoided.

"Goddam robot! You don't care! You don't care at all! What in hell are *you* doing here? I don't need you. *Nobody does!*"

Ten said, "Perhaps it would be better if I requested someone else's help."

Simmal nodded. Ten left. Simmal stood silently with his arm around Farl's shoulders, the latter sobbing and absently fondling Simmal's cross. Ten returned with Nurse Ruby.

"Come on, Farl," she said, and hug-supported him. They headed for the Facility.

Simmal could hear: "No one cares. They're going to murder them like it was nothing . . ."

Ten indicated, "He has undergone tremendous pressure. But he should recover in a short time."

"Mmmm," Simmal agreed. "I'm sorry you had to endure those accusations, Ten. I realize how much you do ache inside."

"Pardon?"

"I had it explained to me. The inner conflicts you are experiencing over tomorrow morning."

Ten paused, then: "You are evidently confused, Father. I have no inner conflicts."

It was Simmal's turn to pause. "But you're a robot, and this is human life —"

"I've indicated before I have resolved the matter logically. There are no conflicts."

Simmal said nothing.

"There is no need, then," Ten continued, "to experience this remorse. Incidentally, Father, I have a request to make. Before the working day concludes, I would like to discuss some religious questions with you —"

Harsher than intended, Simmal blurted, "There will be plenty of time for that on the ship. In fact, nothing but!"

"Understood, Father." Ten lifted, turned. "Tell them to go away, Woldar."

"Go away, spiders," Woldar said.

Simmal stared as Ten returned to the main group, convincing Trania to pour ketchup, not polish its bottle.

Woldar grinned broadly.

MOST OF his possessions were in the tiny cabin aboard the *Seeker* that would be his private universe during the indefinitely long voyage. As a result, Simmal's apartment looked barren. But there were chairs, food and wine.

"And so tomorrow, bright and early, Quenn and the meds come with their needles full of death, and I get to be the official witness! Let's drink to it, Vil."

Capraccio capped a hand on Simmal's glass. "I think you've had enough." He yawned. "I probably have, too."

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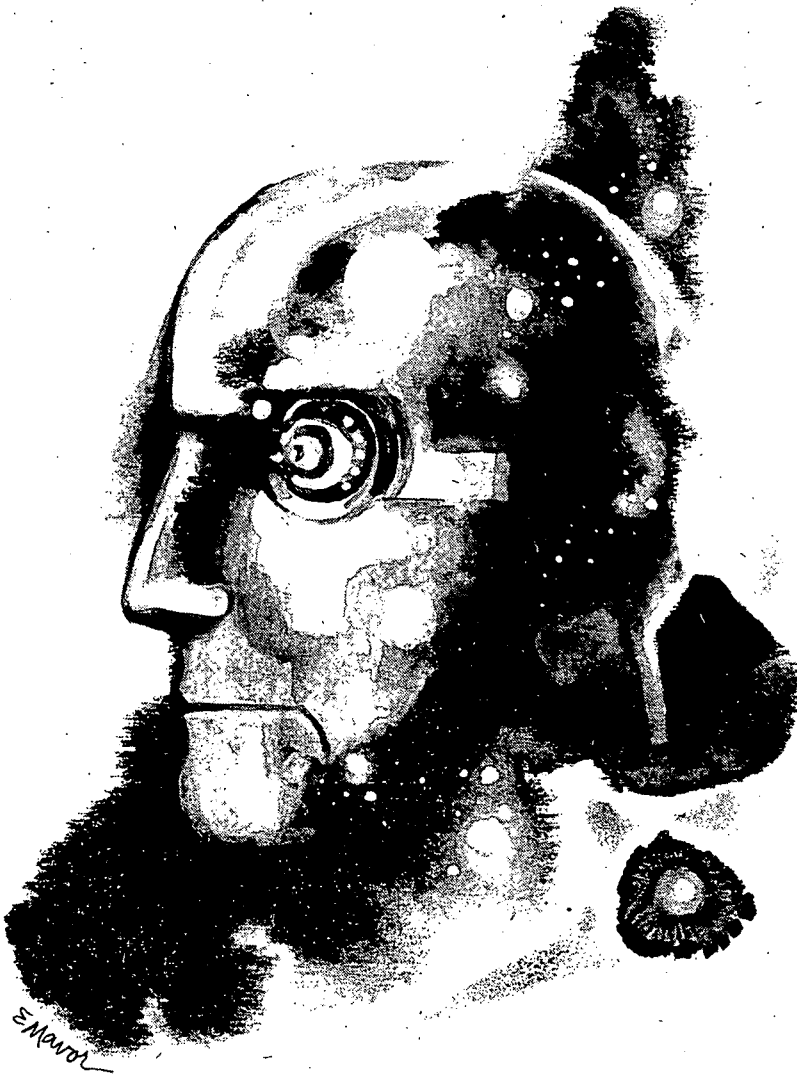

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Simmal shrugged. "A hangover can't make things worse. But if you insist." A giggle. "I wonder if Ten is drowning his own sorrows in lubricating oil tonight?"

"That's cruel, Ray."

"Nope. Just old-fashioned sarcasm." He related what Ten had said.

Capraccio's eyes lit with puzzlement for a moment. "Really? That's peculiar." Repeated yawn. "Must have forgotten more robotics than I thought. Oh, well. What do you say we have our final rest on miserable Earth?"

"Good idea. You know where the couch is. I'll see if I can find my bed."

"Right. 'Night."

Even with alcohol-slowed neurons, Simmal found sleep difficult. When he finally did achieve it, however, it was deep, dreamless. In fact, it took a long while for Capraccio's frantic shaking to rouse him.

Feeling dizzy and miserable, Simmal muttered, "It can't be morning already." He glanced at the chron. "There are hours to go —" He noticed Capraccio's expression. "What is it?"

"Ray! Listen! Are you *sure* Ten told of no conflict?"

"In the name of —"

"Please! It's important!"

Simmal propped himself up. Adrenalin brought him to alertness; Capraccio didn't get upset easily.

"Yes. Like I said. No conflict. What —"

"And this is my most *major* question, Ray. Think hard. Did he ever say *specifically* that he agreed with the euthanasia decision?"

"Well, he obviously isn't against it. I told you he always says —"

"Yes, but was he ever more exact than that?"

Simmal frowned in thought, then decided, "No. What's the problem, Vil?"

"The problem is that I think I *have* forgotten too much about robotics! Where is Ten now?"

"He's at the Facility with aides Gov and Dareen. He always has the night shift —" Simmal felt a chill. "There's something wrong with him?"

"Could be. Could be we've all set our expectations too high with that robot. Can we go over and talk to him?

"I'll get dressed."

They were halfway there when they heard the thunder.

Medical Facility SW-1543 could be seen from the window of Quenn's mobile office. It consisted of an immense pile of rubble, no part of it intact.

"WHEN HE said, 'Armags attacking. Leave at once for safety. I will clear out the patients,' neither of us had reason to disbelieve him. Who'd consider he'd lie about such a thing? So we got on our riders and sped off. Then, about ten minutes later, we — it happen-

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ed — " Dareen put her face down and her hands shook more. Simmal rested his fingers lightly on them.

Quenn demanded from behind his desk, "It didn't strike you as suspicious that you were being 'attacked' by a group that no longer exists?"

"I had suspicions," Gov admitted softly. "Even earlier, Ten was doing a lot of racing around, appearing and disappearing at odd moments. But," he finished, "I didn't act on them."

Capraccio sat leaning forward with his hands folded. "Ten knew his psychology, Director. We've grown so accustomed to jumping at 'Armag' that we react only with fear. And Ten was aware no one would assume he'd lie."

A tall man next to Quenn said, "He was also aware no one checks the activities of a robot. We only discovered the S2-eights missing an hour ago. He got into the Starport arsenal and out with no witnesses. As near as we can make out, he set them off at key points in a sequence designed to make the Facility collapse in on itself as much as possible."

"In that fashion," Capraccio's voice was barely audible, "it guaranteed no survivors, correct?"

The man nodded.

"What about bodies?"

Head shake. "It would take half a day of bulldozing to even begin to clear that mess. And we've found no remains thrown clear."

"I take it," Gov said, "that no search will be started."

Quenn stated, "Correct. We have neither the time nor equipment."

Dareen said, "But none of them will have a proper burial."

"I'm sorry, but we have passed the safety point."

"But the scientists say that's the only definite point; that *probably* the nova won't happen for another couple of years. Surely we can wait another few days."

"No. We can't risk it. My dear, we must think of the living, not the dead."

After a long silence, he continued, "Well, at least the robot went mad here and not aboard a ship. Who knows what harm he might have caused in space?"

"I don't think Ten was mad, Director."

Everyone abruptly stared at Simmal.

Capraccio asked gently, "What do you mean, Ray?"

Father Simmal replied, "It was a message. As you said, Vil, Ten knew psychology. So he also knew what brings up the greatest emotions.

"Let us all finally admit that what *we* planned was murder — but murder made *palatable*. Murder chocolate-covered with dignity and our eternal 'love.' Easy murder. Perhaps *pleasant* murder. Now observe Ten's approach. He eliminated them just as quickly and painlessly as any drug — the explosions had to have been too sudden and power-

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ful for any one to have had the slightest realization of their existence. But, for our benefit, he replaced the sick horror of what killing is all about. Mutilated corpses. Incomprehensible destruction.

"So *look* at it, Director!" Finger to window. "Ten did your job for you. And he amply demonstrated what your job was all about!"

Quenn went, "Ridiculous!"

Dareen said, "No — it makes sense. Ten was so dedicated —"

"Sorry, Dareen. It *is* ridiculous."

Now all eyes were on Capraccio.

"For one thing," he said, "for a robot to kill for *any* reason means that something has gone wrong in the deepest roots of its functioning. Lying and stealing for such a purpose means *total* disorientation. Ten wasn't trying to present any profound thoughts. His thinking simply went scrambled; he turned as schizophrenic as any of his victims."

"And he could still be on the loose," the tall man added, "ready to kill again. He probably escaped those explosions with ease." To Quenn, "Do you want to send out search parties?"

Quenn sighed. "Unnecessary. Just make sure all communities and Starport are guarded. If he shows up, we'll blast him. If not, we'll leave it to Sol to fry his circuits."

Outside the office, Simmal said, "You were rather blunt."

"I had to be," Capraccio smiled without humor. "You've always lived by truth. An insane robot 'teaching us a lesson' isn't it."

"Then he *is* racing around out there. Ready to slaughter again?"

Capraccio shook his head. "Considering how reluctant Ten was to lie to you in the first place, I think there were still some basic old qualities left. Ten felt forced to kill, but I don't believe he desired to go on after he did," he said, gesturing at the rubble. "That's *his* tomb, too."

Simmal regarded it, then turned away and never looked at it again.

He was in his cabin alone when all other eyes were focused on a dwindling planet. He drank, and as each long day went by he drank more and more.

He didn't stop until, when he got around to changing his sheets, he found a note hidden under the mattress.

TEN LED the People from some caverns in the valley. Many of these caverns contained undiscovered, habitable shelters built by the Armags. They would do for a short time; but, now that the others were gone, it was time to get the People into fresh air.

"Cigarettes are for smoking, not eating," Ten informed Orson. Muttering, Orson removed the cigarette from inside his cheek.

"Why — my, where is Father Simmal, Ten?" asked Ella.

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"He won't be returning," was the reply. "He is hopefully feeling greater peace."

If pressed, Ten would have lied, agreeing totally with the euthanasia decision. However, he preferred the statement of resolved logic. It was indeed, after all, a logical matter. Regardless of contrary human directives, life could not be taken. Any robot with the capacity to prevent it should do so. He hence created a deception and utilized tactics he would not otherwise have implemented. When the first detonation occurred, the People had already been moved to safety.

He was aware, of course, that it was unlikely any of the persons he'd rescued would yet live a full lifespan. But Ten's function was to give these individuals' lives whatever extent and reward he could. He would start by converting many presently deserted dwellings into new homes. As the temperature ascended, he would continue to alter the dwellings to compensate. And, when the time came when the sky turned to flame and he could do nothing more, he would go with the People too. But until then there were many more picnics to have.

It was a hostile Earth, a doomed Earth. But above all it was logical to Ten that these, the enduring and meek, be the ones to inherit it.

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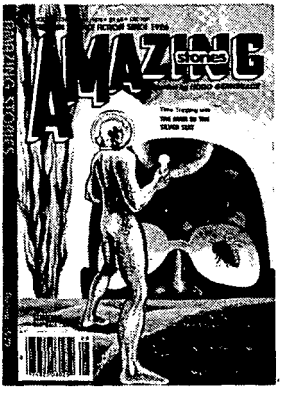

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The ones that got away

by Gus Dallas

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Illustrated by Elinor Mavor

The jungle clearing was full of monsters: enormous, medium-sized and puny; fanged, horned, clawed, tentacled; spiked and spurred. Hideous. The stuff of nightmares.

Delightful, just delightful.

Javavl, a white-badge hunter, one of the *foremost* white-badge hunters of Strandor, surveyed the frightful creatures he had gathered together and was pleased with himself.

What a marvelous planet he had chanced upon in his wide-ranging search for exotic game. He had ransacked this world for the worst it could offer, and here they were; all his!

The question remained: fearsome as they seemed, would they make good quarry on Strandor, in Javavl's hunting preserves? How would they fare against the challenge of Strandor's badged sportsmen?

The monsters rested quietly, segregated in a haphazard fashion. Force rings had kept them penned and protected while their captor flitted around the planet collecting more. Now Javavl brain-numbed them and dismantled the rings. He was ready to leave the planet.

The rings and the rest of his equipment were buried and shielded nearby. This area would be his base when he returned for more beasts after his fellow hunters discovered which ones were the most satisfying.

Talons and tentacles twitched, saw-teeth clur ıped, mandibles clenched feebly, eyes squinted drowsily. The animals were stupefied by Javavl's mental bolts, yet some focused blearily on the Strandorian, sensing him as something that possibly should be munched or at least playfully savaged.

His form was as alien to their senses as their shapes were to his. He resembled a stout post two meters tall. He was dark green at the moment, but he was an animal, not a plant.

Javavl could take on background colorations, from any viewpoint, no matter how complex. His body adopted the chameleon mode only when he willed it or when his pre-conscious sensed danger.

Worm-like sensory organs ringed his rounded crown. A thin pair of arms branched from his upper part, just below the sensors, terminating in spidery fingers. A thicker pair of limbs sprouted from his middle, ending in large hands. A third set extended from his lower part, with flat,two-toed feet at the extremities. Midway between the upper two pairs of limbs was a wide, thin mouth.

His thoughts drifted idly as he awaited the imminent return of his robot spaceship. He fondly examined a torpid creature that looked like a short-furred hump with great bird-like talons. He had just played hide-and-hunt in the jungle with one of its cousins. A gratifying experience. The thing had crept nearly to within striking distance before Javavl's

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kron sense discovered it and he stung it unconscious.

Javavl was still naked from the hunt. Sportsmen wore no protection and carried no fabricated weapons. They hunted only with the little narcotic metal-hard stings manufactured by the Strandorian body and fired through the wrist joints of the middle limbs. It was not sporting to use a mind bolt against game.

The creatures' nutritional needs had been determined and nutrient pellets implanted in each one. They would keep the animals mildly tranquil and nourished for three Strandorian days, to be replenished as required during the journey.

The robot ship would arrive in a few yordls. He had sent it to the system's ninth planet for more kavilon while he collected creatures here on the second. The ship had detected an easy-to-process source there, and Javavl's supply was being depleted by the extensive operation of force rings.

The ship would orbit the planet and wait for him to transmit a descend order through the controller inserted in his brain. Everything was ready for loading; there was no need for further delay.

Javavl made a final, smug appraisal of the wonderful monsters around him. He brushed an upper limb over his quivering, worm-like organs.

Absolutely intoxicating!

At that instant, an exploring spaceship from Earth drenched the jungle clearing in paralysis.

The Earth ship had beamed from a great height, too high to be caught by Javavl's warning sense. The vessel dropped toward the clearing and hovered a few meters above the immobilized creatures, as if contemplating the strange scene for verification.

Tractor rays carefully lifted all the living things into the ship's holds. Vegetation and soil also were scooped up.

Javavl's buried equipment was undetected and left behind as the Earth ship shot into space. *Javavl was not.*

Shortly after, the robot ship arrived, went into orbit around the planet and patiently awaited Javavl's signal.

"C'MON, IT'S just not *real* to find a whole clutch of specimens all ranked out in one big fat bunch like this, just lying around waiting for us to suck 'em up," Rorn Janda complained. "They must've been picked from all *over* the freaking planet!"

"You're freaking right, and I'm not arguing one bit," snapped Garmi Ross, nominal captain of the specimen-collecting spaceship. "But there they were, we tractored them, and now we're making a bolt. Who's

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denying the reality of that?"

"If you want to be constructive, Rorn," said Bron Svetlik, third of the thieving trio, "make the ship zoom."

Janda shook his head, more in resignation than in complaint. He slouched in the spaceship's command seat in the slot formed by the U-shaped control console, staring over the tiered banks and through the transparent bow six meters before him.

"We're at maxi already," he grumbled. "I got us off to a running start. I wasn't waiting for this jaunty zoo-keeper to come back — especially when I don't know *who* or *what* it is."

"If we're at maxi, then we've already cleared the system," said Ross, standing behind the slot. He owned the contract from Titan University Prime to pluck animals and plants from unexplored planets for study.

"I don't think the zoo-keeper can find us now," he said. "If he, she or it — or possibly a multiple — is some superbeing with powers we can't imagine, we'd be packaged by now and in the holds mingling with the rest of the animals. We're going to score safe on this move."

"Oh, I hope so," Janda said, shaking his head slowly. "The detectors show blank. No one's on our trail. Within scope, at least."

Janda, pilot-engineer and chief complainer, was not as distressed as he sounded, Ross suspected. Janda was big and stocky and had the look of a tavern walloper. It was his nature to react in opposition to whatever anyone else said.

Svetlik snorted scornfully.

"If we hadn't found this planet and such a tidy zoo on our first sweep, we might've gone caroming around this sector for six months and only come back with a fraction of the load," he said.

"We didn't spot anything on or near the planet, did we? The 'whatsit' that clustered the animals is gone." He gestured with upturned palms. "So the universe gave us a break for a change. Besides, I need the money more than 'whosit' does."

Janda, his back to his partners, acknowledged with a grunted "Hmmmn" and nodded slowly. Astonishingly, he seemed to be agreeing with someone. He looked deep into the star mists spread before him, absently fingering the laser blade he wore stuck to his belt.

Ross exchanged glances with Svetlik, who scratched his balding head and displayed a faint smile on his fleshy lips. This ship, which the three owned jointly, was fast, armed and armored, Ross reflected. Janda, for all his gloom, was reliable and very strong. As long as he had the ship at his fingertips, as long as he had his nerve and stubbornness, he'd tussle with anything if the prize were big enough. Anything within limits, of course, Ross amended.

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"Listen," Janda said suddenly, "the university pays good commissions for new critters the biotechs can take apart, but I feel a little like those animals under the techs' cutters sometimes, you know, like there's no future in piece work.

"I'm with you in this — if we make it. After we get paid off for his load, I'll have enough blue to contract with one of the big-time explorer ships out on the edge, working for the frontier corporations."

He glanced over his shoulder at his partners. "You can get rich out there. Dead, maybe, or rich, but either way, your money problems are fixed forever."

"Sure," Ross said. "There should be a lot in this for me. This load should really impress the university chancellors — enough to make a big dent, in fact."

Svetlik squinted one eye.

"Enough to hand you the new post of deputy field director in the xenobiology department," he said.

"Sure enough," Ross said. "I won't have to fantasize anymore about what I could do out here with a free hand — and the university's resources. The university *owes* me."

Ross and his partners made a neat but not gaudy income smuggling exotic fauna, flora and just plain alien dirt for the university's researchers. They delivered to a secret base on a lifeless planet in a lifeless system. The imperial government disapproved of running ungraded and potentially dangerous organisms into or through populated sectors.

Judicious bribery and the university's recognition signal in the ship's responder took care of most of the transit problems. Privateers of the explorer corporations were another matter. You just tried your damnedest not to meet one.

"If I felt like it," Ross continued absently, "I could come back to that jungle planet we just ran from."

Svetlik arched his eyebrows and Janda stared wide-eyed, leaving Ross with the impression that somehow he had failed to win their enthusiasm.

"Well," he said apologetically, "I *am* curious about the mysterious collector we just robbed. What if he's a star traveler from a region the Empire doesn't know anything about? We didn't detect any intelligent indigenes on that planet. If could mean another contact with a new interstellar civilization."

"Doesn't arouse my curiosity a bit," Svetlik said. "If he's that civilized, he'll sure as hell be roaring at us. I'd rather wait until he gets over his 'mad.'"

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"You don't wonder how it's possible for so many incredibly different life forms to develop on the same planet at the same time?"

"Let the university worry about that," Janda replied. "I've got my own worries about them."

Ross sighed and turned his attention to instruments ranged along the bulkhead.

"Specimens alive, uninjured, in good health," he read. "Coming out of paralysis."

Grids and shields functioning in both holds, he saw. Defenses operating, in case any creature exhibited unpleasant abilities, such as strength to tear through impervion bulkheads or to teleport.

Conscious of Svetlik beside him, he observed quietly: "The doc's got their bios and feedings set up. But notice this intriguing factor: All but one of the animals have nutrient feeders subcutaneously implanted. The doc calculates the dosages should keep them nourished for about four days."

"Considerate of the, er, zoo-keeper," Svetlik remarked.

"Yuh," Ross said, noting also that the doc had reported that the one creature missing a nutrient insert registered a metabolism that wouldn't require additional nutrition for about three days.

"The inserts have barely begun dissolving," Ross muttered, casting a sidelong glance at Janda, who was out of earshot, back at the bridge controls.

"I suspect it means they were recently put in and our mysterious friendly collector was closer than we knew when we snatched his layout."

JAVAVL AWOKE. His pre-conscious quickly assured him that no danger threated, and his kron sense automatically swept the surroundings. He was in a patch of jungle material. The animals were with him, still numbed. He was unhampered, his limbs and body free.

He sensed a vacuum outside the nearest wall. Aboard a small spaceship. No familiar impressions from the design or materials. Impervious, impermeable metal hull that interfered with the kron. Invisible energy walls enclosed him.

He was a prisoner with the creatures he had trapped on the jungle world! His animals, by Gorchi and by Zag! *Stolen, and he stolen with them!*

He extended his kron sense to its limit, about 20 meters. In one direction were the engines, the stern and the void. His kron could not penetrate all the way forward. He had an impression of movement just beyond its limit, inside a space he felt was the foremost chamber in the ship.

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Who were his captors? Probably of a race not known to Strandor. The pirates, apparently, had marked him as just one of the menagerie.

Well, well, so his captors did not know he was a superior intelligence and a white-badge hunter. Javavl sneered — he had a mouth and could do so, in his fashion.

How far had he been carried, he wondered. He triggered the controller in his brain and was relieved when he made contact with his robot ship, still orbiting the beast planet.

He ordered the ship to pursue, tracking his communicator. He did not know how fast the pirate ship was traveling, but he knew dimly about how long he had been unconscious, and he was still in contact range with his ship. Assuming the pirates were fleeing at maximum velocity — which they should be if they had any concept of guilt — his own ship could soon overtake them.

The equivalent of a second brain, Javavl's pre-conscious instinct was always on guard, constantly passing intuitively-gleaned information to the conscious mind — such as the fact that he and the beasts were segregated by energy grids.

A leathery lump of a monster shared this grid with him, but the creature slumbered and was momentarily of no concern.

A bulky creature in an adjacent grid rustled in torn grass. A spherical head covered with short, sharp spikes thrust toward Javavl at the end of a snake-like neck.

The Strandorian watched the fearsome head jerk back when it struck the energy wall. Two yellow eye slits opened on the spiked ball and stared at him dazedly.

Very good, so far, Javavl thought, and probed with his kron to learn that about half of his animals were in this long, low-ceilinged chamber with him, the rest in an adjacent duplicate chamber.

There were two force planes, he sensed, separating him from a clear zone between the front row of beasts and the large chamber's forward bulkhead. A large valve-like door was centered in the broad metal bulkhead.

His pre-conscious assured him that the force plane resisted physical passage but was yielding and probably could be penetrated with determined pressure. The shock would paralyze any mind that passed through, but was not lethal.

Accordingly, his conscious mind gave a series of instructions to his pre-conscious survival instinct. He adopted the chameleon mode, and lunged into the energy wall.

His conscious mind was jolted into insensibility. The pre-conscious "brain" stubbornly obeyed the command to keep driving through the force fields.

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Javavl's mindless body lurched through the adjoining grid space, brushed an immobilized, fanged and gristled heap and crashed through the second force plane, blundering to a stop against the metal bulkhead.

The pre-conscious carried out the next sequence: wake the conscious immediately!

Because of the brutal effects of the shocks, it took several moments; he would have been wakened instantly if he were merely asleep.

Javavl's kron probed the foremost chamber of the spaceship and he perceived the pirates' forms: two upper limbs, two lower, massive bodies, furry crowns, about his height. Powerful looking, but no claws, hooks or fangs he observed. Still, nature was full of surprises and these beings just might make a fair match and provide him with some sport.

They seemed unaware of the activity in the hold. Excellent.

Javavl scrutinized four small, color-coded, glossy tabs and a larger oval plate of the same material set into the bulkhead beside the larger circular valve, which must be the exit from the chamber. Would he trigger alarms if he allowed his instinct to test them, he wondered?

Then his instinct warned him to scan overhead, quickly.

The black metal ovoid he saw must have been hovering there all along, motionless, at the edge of his attention. His pre-conscious had not responded to it as a potential threat until it moved. Now it sank toward him slowly, little lenses glinting.

"I COUNT 26 beauties in the holds," Ross said, "and — they're just gorgeous!"

"They'll be prettier when they're converted into blue Empire currency," Svetlik said.

"Just keep a quick eye on them," Janda said. "I'm keeping a quick finger on the jettison tab. The first flicker of serious trouble, I'm jettisoning the whole flock."

"Get a good grip on yourself, then," Ross said warily. "I've got a news bulletin for you, but *don't panic.*"

"What's the matter?" Janda cried.

"Take your finger off the jettison tab and I'll tell you," Ross commanded. "Look at the field generators. Something activated two force walls a minute ago. Strong discharges. Something might have poked through a couple of barriers."

"Look at that, there's another!" Janda exclaimed, rising and looking closely at a telltale monitor.

"Just our guests testing the force planes," Svetlik said.

"Looking for the room service tab," Ross added. "First thing *I* always do when I wake up in a strange hotel."

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"It happens every load when the things wake up," Svetlik continued.

"Not discharges like that," Janda said. "That's the way it reads when something breaks through."

So let's check, Ross thought, and swept the hold with a spy beam, displaying the pickup in a holographic vizi.

"Nothing looks loose," he said and polarized the view from the robodoc's sensors in another vizi. Deck and animals seemed to fall away as the robodoc apparently rose higher.

"The doc's leaving," he said. "Some critter knocked itself out with a jolt from a force wall and the doc made sure it was all right. Doc would have called us if it was anything it couldn't handle."

"There were three shocks," Janda reminded him.

"The doc scoped every animal in the hold, Rorn," Ross said placatingly. "C'mon, none has a nervous system that can pass through an energy screen without the animal blanking out. Remember how long they stayed paralyzed by our ray."

Janda looked grimly unconvinced. If he doesn't take that look out of his eye, Ross thought, he's going to unconvince me, and then I'll be in *real* trouble.

Shaking his head in mild exasperation, Ross moved toward the valve that led to the stern. He rapped a locker and it opened, revealing rand pistols stuck to a backboard.

"The doc has a sharper eye than me," he said, "but I'll go take a look."

He pulled out a rand, checked the charge and set it for maxi stun.

"Maybe I can sense something the doc is missing," he said. "Now, would I go down there alone and practically unarmed if I thought something dangerous was lurking in the hold?"

Janda considered the question for a moment. "Yeah," he replied thoughtfully, "your brain's tippy enough."

Ross raised his eyes to the overhead, but finding no rebuttal, he turned and walked aft, through the narrow chamber containing bunks and two desks.

He touched the memory plate beside the valve door at the other end of the narrow sleeping quarters, and the door recognized him, dilating like a great blue-grey iris.

Ross passed onto a platform overlooking a large central chamber of the small spacecraft, an elliptical cross-section. An airlock was on his right.

He strode down one of the two catwalks that bridged the platform and the entrances of the two holds. He dilated the memory iris of the starboard hold, revealing a tubular ramp slanting down to another sealed valve. Entering, he carefully contracted the first door before

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continuing down the lighted incline and opening the lower door.

Stepping onto the pale blue-grey deck, he located the robodoc, hanging motionless overhead. He lowered his gaze to the chaotic jungle material held back by the forward energy wall and met the wary stares of bug eyes, slip eyes, faceted eyes and stalked eyes. They reflected a lethargy that encouraged him.

No sense of anything more bizarre than usual, he thought. Doc would be tending any animal injured in a force field. Still, he was uneasy, and he resented Rorn's infecting him with that faint uncertainty.

Ross really hoped that someday he would discover another interstellar culture for the Tellurian Empire, but he also hoped to do it when he had all the power of a huge university explorer-battleship with him.

Something dark rippled in a front grid: a man-sized, segmented creature with many legs and a frightful cluster of barbed feelers shooting from a gristly forepart. Ross couldn't tell if it had eyes, but he could feel himself getting a good looking over.

JAVAVL KNELT motionless among the thick blue-green stalks and leaves behind the segmented beast, observing closely the alien and confirming his belief that the pirate would not detect him. He also noted that they both breathed the same air, which was convenient.

The pirate turned shortly and strode up the ramp. The valve closed behind him, but Javavl's kron perceived the creature opening the upper door. Ah, a simple operation, Javavl was pleased to note.

The segmented monster cautiously brushed Javavl with a barbed feeler, but he was punished for his brashness. The Strandorian directed a mild stun-thought into its brain and it keeled over. Soon, it struggled to its many feet and moved aside, discreetly choosing to henceforth ignore its awesome grid mate.

Javavl dismissed his captivity as a problem practically solved, and speculated briefly on his future.

The aliens, he realized, should make superb game. Stripped and brought to Strandor as animals, they would scarcely be recognized as sentient beings, with such gross forms. Who would think to read their alien expressions and gestures as signs of intelligence?

Suppose Strandor's wide-ranging starships someday encountered one of the aliens' outposts. By then, the creatures would be a prized quarry and himself a wealthy, paramount badge. Appreciative, influential badges and some selective bribery would soften the wrath of Strandor's ethics-hobbled overchiefs.

Returning to immediate matters, Javavl communicated with his robot ship. He wanted it on hand as a backup when he seized this craft, not presuming ability to manipulate instruments of alien design.

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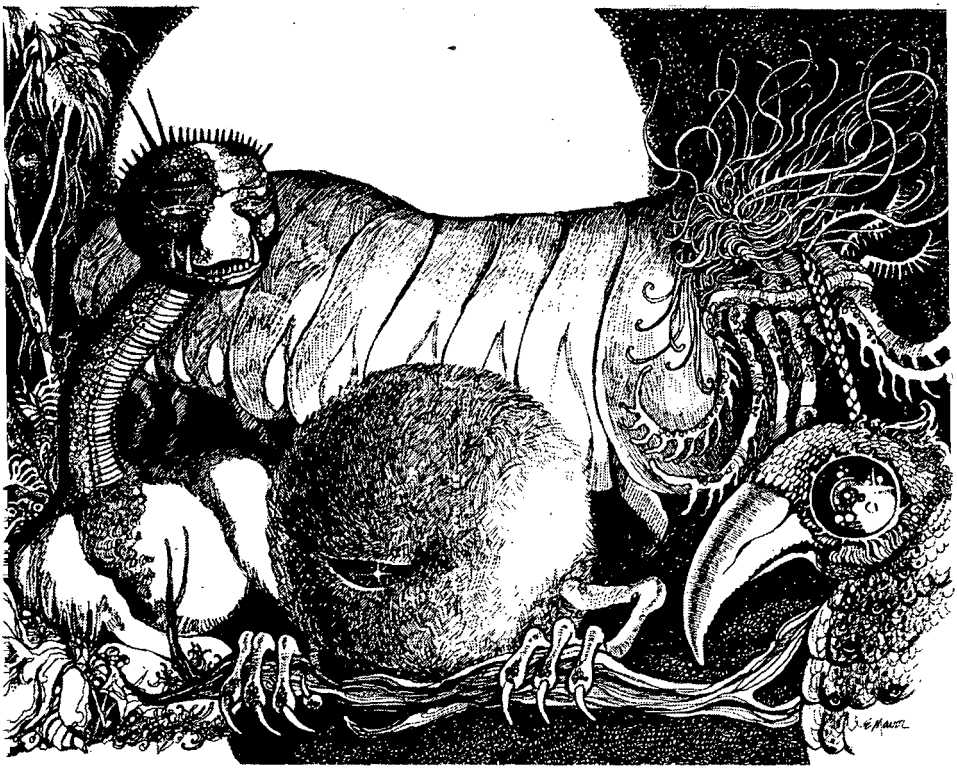

He cautioned himself against proceeding with arrogance. Don't forget the facts: the pirates *are* sapient, and three to one!

How could he divide their force, he pondered; perhaps by luring one of them to this chamber again without stirring suspicion? He studied the screen vents in the low overhead, one above each grid. They circulated air, of course, which could not seep through energy walls rapidly enough to sustain life.

The openings were within reach. Javavl ripped up some thick, heavily-foliaged stalks and jammed them into the vents, breaking through the protective mesh.

He waited patiently, and eventually the segmented monster in his grid uttered low, trilling sounds of distress. He disliked having to share its discomfort, but it seemed best to be in the same space when his captors arrived. He hoped the pirates had enough compassion to hurry to the beast's rescue. Prudently, he waited close to an energy wall

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behind a thick clump of vegetation that would hide his movement if he were forced to seek air in an adjoining grid.

RETURNING FROM inspecting the hold, Ross merrily sauntered into the bridge and replaced the rand in the locker. Naively, he began: "Everything's fine down . . . ."

"Says you," Janda snapped, turning about in his large, swiveled command chair.

Ross lifted an eyebrow and looked toward Svetlik for explanation.

"Mechanical problem in the starboard hold," Svetlik said. "Doc just signaled for help. Air vent in a grid blocked and it can't pull out the obstruction."

"I checked both holds and fiddled with the regulators outside," Ross said. "Must've happened after I left the starboard hold."

"A rambunctious beast," Svetlik said, and gestured at a holographic display.

Ross looked and saw the vegetable stalks jammed into the air vent. The robodoc hovered over the segmented monster, which was undulating in a sluggish way and trilling plaintively, but the robot could not supply it with air.

"I better go back," Ross said, a martyred look shaping his features and reflecting his mind to a sympathetic Svetlik.

"I'll go with you," Svetlik said. "Maybe we should give the deck a good inspection."

JAVAVL CONGRATULATED himself immodestly as the massive valve dilated and two pirates entered the chamber. Both beings carried things that surely must be weapons, but Javavl's instinct sense could not gauge their potential until one was fired; and not much good that would be if *he* were the target.

The Strandorian could not hear, but experience with aliens had taught him that some beings could transfer information by modulating air vibrations.

"Looks like all you have to do is walk in, grab the stalks and yank 'em out," one of the pirates vocalized.

"Why don't you pull them down while I wait here and hold the guns?" the other responded.

"You're taller than I."

"We made *me* captain because I'm qualified to make these decisions remember?"

One of the pirates tapped out a pattern on the glossy tabs beside the dilated door, terminating the forward energy wall of the airless grid; the three adjacent walls remained.

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Javavl's normal impulse was to pursue this as a hunt and capture the quarry in a sporting manner. But the stakes were too high for games. He could not risk being held and investigated by an alien, star-facing civilization that then would be aware of Strandor's existence while his own race remained ignorant of a rival power. The obligation to guarantee escape transcended the hunting code.

The fact that by keeping *both* Strandor and the aliens ignorant of each other while he profited from his own knowledge fortunately presented no moral conflict.

Therefore, he hurled mental stun-bolts at the pirates and was himself stunned when they showed almost no effect. He observed the pirates stopping short momentarily, then one stepping back to the controls when the fallen energy wall sprang up again.

A pity, Javavl commiserated with himself. He might have anticipated this — his own breed was immune to mental attack, too. Possibly his stings might down the aliens — his own kind was not immune to the venom — but the energy field's resistance would likely slow or deflect the barbs, and that would definitely give him away.

Ah, well, he could still shoot them when they terminated the energy wall to aid the dying beast, if they hadn't been too alarmed.

"You feel that?" Svetlik asked. "Like ghost fingers patting your brain?"

"One of the critters trying to zap us," Ross said calmly, scratching his ear with the muzzle of his rand. "Happened before. It never works. It's never been shown that any wild animal with psi abilities can seriously affect a much-higher order mentality. And most especially an other-world mind.

"However, Bron, I'll entertain a proposal that we hurry up our business and get out of here."

"What are we going to do about the poor centipede," Svetlik asked. "It's suffocating again, with the wall back."

Ross looked at the robodoc hovering next to the distressed monster and suddenly perked up.

"The doc, of course!" he exclaimed, and ordered the black ovoid, who hadn't been able to *pull* out the jamming vegetation, to rise and cut the stuff out with its surgical rays.

JAVAVL WATCHED the two pirates exit, sealing the iris behind them. They certainly were uncooperative creatures. Well, small matter now, since he also could open their portals. He could stalk them in the forward part of their ship, where they might be less alert. That would make the game a little fairer. He felt, then, a surge of eagerness, pleasure and zest. He was in hunting mode!

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"WE WON'T mention this incident to Rorn, will we?" Svetlik asked before they entered the sleeping section and walked toward the bridge.

"He only talks coward, he's okay in a pinch," Ross said, smiling. "He saved us over on Klaza 2 when we were cornered by some two-legged lizard that was two-thirds teeth. The way Rorn yelled 'Let's panic and run,' while the thing was stalking us, I thought he'd be away like a shot when the thing hopped on us. He lost his temper, though, and diced it with his trusty laser blade."

Ross was calling up some fond memories of Janda when the subject suddenly blocked their entrance to the bridge.

"Don't bother making up a fairy tale, I saw everything in the vizi," he said, hardly bothering to suppress a sneer. "What happened?"

"We handled it, honestly," Ross said.

"So did I," Janda replied. "I've energized the kill-screens. Nothing goes through an iris anymore and comes out alive."

Ross, horrified, exclaimed: "We just walked through one!"

"I gave you a second," Janda said smugly. He held up a flattened, pearly egg, unzipped a breast pocket in his singlesuit and slipped it inside. He held out two more in his other hand. His white-faced partners took the neutralizers with eloquent silence.

JAVAVL SNAPPED back to consciousness after crashing through the force wall into the clear zone at the front of the chamber. He hastened to the control dots beside the valve. The robodoc ignored him — good, he thought, it only responds to animals injured inside the grid walls.

The Strandorian touched the memory plate with a middle hand and the iris remained sealed. Anxiously, he slapped the plate with an upper hand and still nothing happened.

He had fallen into the pit of overconfidence! He cursed his stupidity and briefly fantasized firing stings into his own rectum. Mentally sighing, he recognized now that the door responded to programmed identities.

What now? Would any of the pirates return to investigate still another curiosity? Certainly, and fully on guard, too. Javavl studied the control studs. Yes, a failed energy barrier should bring someone to investigate. He had observed the alien's manipulation of the controls. With the aid of his pre-conscious, he repeated the pattern.

"ONE OF the grid walls is out in the starboard hold," Svetlik told Ross in a lowered voice.

Ross sat at a desk in the cramped sleeping quarters behind the bridge, where Janda could be seen slumped low in the soft command

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chair and apparently dozing as the computer sped the ship through space.

Ross looked up from the computer printouts he had been reading. He sighed with unmasked resignation and said: "I expected something."

"You're not surprised?" Svetlik asked, sitting on a bunk across the narrow passageway.

"Look at these analyses of those first force wall discharges," Ross said, handing over the printouts. "They were strong, as if something went all the way through the field. Look at the pattern on the grid diagram. A straight line from Grid 3B into the open zone. I bet Grid 1B is the one that lost the wall."

Svetlik looked grim and nodded slowly.

"You're trying to get me to say we snatched the jickery collector with his jickery zoo," he snapped. "Okay, what the jicker do we do now?"

"Apologize, abjectly, and hope he accepts," Ross said. "We'd better tell 'Mr. I told-you-so,' " he added, rising.

Surprisingly, Janda took the news calmly, as if the acknowledgement that his fears had been justified solved everything.

"Why didn't he just holler for you to let him out when you were in the hold?" Janda asked.

"Maybe he did," Ross said regretfully. "Who knows how he talks? And how often does a zoo-keeper listen when a lion or a gidril tries to explain that a terrible mistake has been made?

"But listen, this is our chance to make history!" Ross suddenly grew animated. "We've contacted still another alien intelligence! We'll *be* history!"

"Wouldn't it be a good idea to figure out which of those critters is him?" Svetlik asked.

Ross hastily poked at the holograph controls, bringing Grid 1B into closeup and thereby stifling some of his enthusiasm.

"That fat centipede can't be him!" he cried. "Where the hell — Wait! Wait! Remember doc's report that one of the critters didn't have a nutrition implant?"

Eagerly, he called up an image of that creature, as recorded by the robodoc. Then he stared blankly into a display of what appeared to be an untenanted patch of blue-green vegetation. Beside him, Svetlik and Janda leaned closer, equally baffled.

"B'god, there he is!" Ross exclaimed. "See the folded arms on that fat post? No wonder we never noticed! He's the same color as the vegetation!"

Quickly, he swept the plant-filled grids with a spy. "And now you don't see it," he grunted. "Aaahrrrr, we'll never find him this way!"

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Pregnant silence.

"Okay," Janda said suddenly, matter-of-factly. "I'll go."

Ross was dumfounded. Svetlik's eyes bugged.

"You folks stay here and analyze the situation like a couple of university deans," Janda continued, "while I slip back and save our tails again."

"Hold on, you're our skilled pilot and navigator," Svetlik blurted. "I'll go. I want to be sure I get back so they'll put my name in that history book."

"They'll spell it wrong, Svetlik," Ross said. "It was my idea to speak to strangers, so I'll go. You keep sharp eyes on me."

To cut off dispute, Ross opened the locker and took out three palm-sized spray canisters, two of which he put on a shelf.

"Cupane gas?" Svetlik gasped. "That's some way to make a favorable impression on him!"

"In case there's an unfortunate breakdown in communications," Ross replied. He took a box of antidotes from the locker and popped a capsule into his mouth. He offered the rest to Svetlik and Janda, because everyone on the ship would need one if the super-knockout gas was going to be let loose.

Too soon, Ross found himself staring down the incline to the sealed lower valve of the starboard hold and wondering if he weren't being childishly simple, expecting the alien to laugh and say the joke was on him and everything was forgiven.

What if the alien had been deliberately avoiding communication? Planning to capture or eliminate the Earthmen?

This is an alien *intelligence* waiting, not a dumb beast, he reflected. He doesn't have to think like a human being. He may be waiting to pounce. No time for rational discussion or cupane gas.

He checked his rand and changed the setting to kill. And felt pangs of guilt.

How would I react in his place, he wondered. Kidnapped by strangers who asked no questions. Abandoned with a bunch of crazy beasts. He doesn't know what to think about us any more than we do about him.

He's not an animal, Ross told himself, and I guess I'm not either. Sighing, he changed the rand setting back to stun. He felt better about that, but now he was scared as hell!

JAVAVL PRESSED against the bulkhead as the iris dilated and fingered the controls, terminating another grid wall. The pirate entered cautiously, rotating his cranium so that his sight organs could scan the chamber. The glance in his direction was quick and obviously failed to

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discern him, even at this distance.

Quickly, as the pirate turned away, Javavl darted toward the open iris and at the same time sent a feeble but irritating mind stab at the creature in the grid he had just unshielded.

That'll occupy him, Javavl chortled mentally, then stopped short, frantically seeking his balance as he checked his lunge at the door. He caught himself, aghast, as his pre-conscious shouted at him that this was no paralyzing field across the opening but something of lethal force!

"Garmi, the wall's out on 1E!" The thin air cried in Svetlik's voice.

Ross whirled and crouched, facing the threat. A fat-bodied serpent thing slithered out of the grid, angered by Javavl's mental jolt, and streaked toward Ross. Just as swiftly, the robodoc shot across the chamber, under Svetlik's control, and banged into the beak as the serpent struck at Ross. Ross fired simultaneously, but the charge missed as the serpent was knocked aside.

A lashing coil clouted the robodoc and sent it spinning. The serpent's beak drove at Ross again, but this time the rand blast smacked it in the face and the long body hurtled past the man and stretched its length across the deck.

The robodoc came back to the serpent, now to check its condition. Ross cried: "Where is he?"

"I don't see him!" Svetlik's voice called.

Ross suddenly spun about and stared at the force field controls, and at that distance, concentrating, he saw Javavl. Something sharp hit him forcefully in the breast. There was no time for pain. He doubled over onto the deck.

Javavl knelt by the pirate, deliberately adopting a contrasting coloration so that he would be clearly visible to the observer he guessed was looking on. He hoped that would prevent the watcher from deducing his camouflage ability. Speed was important now in capturing the ship — his own vessel was closing rapidly and surely must be detected momentarily.

The pirate had passed safely through the killing screen. Javavl had kronned him hesitate before entering the ramp and touch his breast. Javavl ripped open a pocket and pulled out a pearly ovoid. Instinct strongly suggested that this was a nullifier. It better be, he told his instinct sense.

The floating metal thing suddenly hit him and he batted it away. Then it settled onto the pirate and Javavl noticed the red stain where the sting had hit. At the same time, he observed the watcher in the bridge leave his instruments and rush this way. That should mean, he

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calculated, that the robot floater had no controller to send it against him.

Javavl hoisted the pirate's body and carried it up the incline, the nullifier allowing both to pass safely. At the sealed upper door, Javavl slapped the pirate's hand against the memory plate. The iris opened.

Adopting chameleon mode again, Javavl dropped the unconscious pirate outside the deadly screen and stepped out after him. Then the second pirate appeared at the other end of the catwalk.

SVETLIK HALTED on the platform, holding a cupane spray, and watched the valve entrance of the hold open. He was astonished when Ross's body fell out and the alien did not appear.

Behind him, Janda bellowed, startling him: "Get the guy quick, Bron, there's a no-signal spaceship on our tail!"

Then I've got to go after *him*, I can't wait, Svetlik thought, and took a step toward the catwalk. He hoped he wouldn't be sorry he had not cut him up with doc's surgery rays. His vision seemed to blur, then, as he stared at the open valve, and his brain received a crazy impression of a transparent post hurtling at him. Reacting instinctively, he leaped backward through the iris and dodged behind the frame. Something zinged into the passage, nicking the doorway and ricocheting into the opposite bulkhead.

He's invisible! Svetlik thought, but he's right at the door! He leaned in front of the opening to fire the gas bomb, but he misjudged the alien's speed. Javavl plunged through the door and they collided.

Svetlik staggered back, the gas bomb flying away. He braced himself and stopped Javavl, spun on one foot and slammed the Strandorian into a bunk. Javavl bounced aside, and as Svetlik drove after him, he fired a sting into the Earthman's side. Svetlik crashed into the bunk and tumbled to the deck.

Janda was out of his control seat and blocking the door to the bridge. As Javavl flew toward him, Janda fired a stun charge that missed the blurred, thin figure. Then, sting zinged past the big man's head.

He knew an excellent response to such a confusing attack. He countercharged as another sting zipped past his shoulder. He crashed into Javavl and the Strandorian was flung back. A flailing and almost invisible hand punched the rand out of Janda's fingers, but then Javavl needed all four hands to keep himself from falling backwards.

Janda snatched the laser blade from his belt, activating it as he swiped at Javavl. The blade sliced a line across the Strandorian's middle. Javavl let himself sprawl backward to the deck, escaping the return sweep of the knife. He stung the Earthman from where he lay and rolled aside as the heavy human thudded to the deck.

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Javavl rose and examined his wound. Painful but not serious — the blade had cauterized its own incision. He marched to the control consoles and verified his earlier opinion. The instrumentation was too different and it would be dangerous to experiment. He would have to tow the ship back to Strandor.

Its drive would have to be cut off some way. With luck, the engineering principles could be diagnosed enough for his instinct sense to guide him in shutting down the engines, but he would have to bring his tools across from his own ship.

He mentally directed his ship to the airlock he had passed in the midsection of this vessel. There would be contact shortly.

Leaving the bridge, he observed the floating medical device settling beside the large alien and begin tending the slight bleeding wound left by the sting. The faithful machine had followed from the hold to minister to the injured masters.

He went to the airlock and studied the control tabs. His pre-conscious helped him solve the operating pattern from what he knew of the combinations that opened irises within the ship. Presently, he felt a slight tremor as his ship nudged the outer lock with a transfer tube. He activated the airlock.

Then, shockingly, an icy point touched him in the back between his upper arms. Javavl had been concentrating on opening the airlock, leaving his pre-conscious to warn him if danger appeared. His instinct sense had faithfully performed its duty, but nevertheless it had betrayed him. It had recognized the approaching medical machine, but since Javavl was wounded, the floater was bringing aid, and was not a threat.

The robot doctor quietly going about its business, had tended the pirates' hurts and finally got around to Javavl. Low priority, of course, but he was indexed in the machine's program.

Javavl knew the injection would put him to sleep, and he would be lost if he collapsed here. The doctor machine obviously classed him as "animal." The efficient device probably had given him a sedative that would leave him unconscious until the masters revived and could deal with their "animal."

His pre-conscious labored to keep him awake as the inner door of the airlock opened and he stumbled in. The pre-conscious could not negate the effects of the swift-acting drug, but it could briefly resist. Fortunately, the lock mechanism would now operate automatically.

Javavl became aware of the fact that the medical device was still with him, attempting to treat his wound. His mouth slit twitched as ironic laughter struggled upward in his throat. As the inner lock began closing, the floating instrument abandoned him, darting back into the

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pirate ship. Good servant, Javavl thought drowsily, you have done well for your masters.

He lurched through the transfer tube into his own airlock and then somehow he was inside his ship and the airlock was resealing. He ordered the robot ship to secure itself, abandon the other vessel and return to Strandor. Then he pitched to the deck.

They will not believe me in the White Lodge when I tell them of the ones that got away, Javavl thought woozily, sinking into deep sleep.

The Strandorian robot ship separated from the Earth craft and veered away. In an instant, the spaceships were lost to each other in the infinite void.

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FANTASTIC FACTS

MAKING WAVES

MOZART AND Beethoven heard symphonies in their heads and simply wrote them down. Artists tell you their ideas for paintings spring, unbidden and full-blown upon the canvas of the mind. Scientists, mathematicians and writers report similar experiences. Experiments have been done that show this creative process relates directly to brain wave patterns. Most people produce more alpha waves when relaxing and less while concentrating on a problem. Creative people do just the opposite, dealing with imaginative problems during high alpha wave production and with less conscious thought. They simply process information differently. The next time you see someone in a state of reverie, or day-dreaming — walk softly — they may be coming up with the next Great American Novel!

BRAIN VS. PAIN

ALTHOUGH IT interprets pain signals from the rest of the body, the brain itself is completely insensitive to pain. It has also been discovered that the brain manufactures its own opiates. These natural chemicals match the painkilling substance morphine, found in the opium poppy. The ancient Chinese smoked opium to alleviate pain, and for 2300 years they have used acupuncture — still regarded with skepticism in the west. A link has been discovered between acupuncture's anesthetic action and the natural opiates produced by the brain. It appears that the needles used in acupuncture stimulate nerve endings that trigger the release of natural, painkilling chemicals from the brain or spinal cord, effectively reducing the sensations of pain. The faith the patient has in the treatment enhances its success. This *placebo* effect is noted in many medical and non-medical treatments for pain or illness. Followers of Eastern religions may also be able to release their natural opiates during trance states, explaining how mystics can walk over hot coals.

Recently, a drug was developed, D-phenylalanine (DPA), that allows the level of natural painkilling chemicals in the brain to rise. Nine out of eleven people treated with DPA experienced marked or total relief from chronic pain without sedation, tolerance buildup or withdrawal symptoms upon cessation of treatment. Best of all, only two days of treatment usually provided relief for up to a month.

DPA is still in the testing stage, but for the first time in our history, man's battle against chronic pain seems to have a chance of succeeding where all else has failed.

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DAEMON PART 2

O'er the dark vast sea the ship sails while the Evening Star paints a silver path for us across the shimmering waves. There has been ample time for dreaming. The men find it hard to mark the empty hours, as time, like grains of sand, trickles uselessly through our fingers. What strange hand has placed the stars in that vast design above? Are they like we, bloodbrothers cursed to wander the infinite black sea of space, forever? Mother Sea is old in wisdom. From the deep her ageless voice haunts my soul. 'Follow the dreams of youth my sons, waste not your life. Enjoyment as an end is not enough, life was made for sterner stuff.... seek strife.'

Stephen & Chip Fabian

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I have chosen my crew carefully. Men unafraid to live, unafraid to die free. Silent they are now. I have listened to their tales of war, of love. We have laughed and cried together, remembering good comrades lost in battle, good women left behind. These are honest men, leaving decent folk to their own destiny. They fight only those who would shackle their freedom. Giant men with giant hearts whose immortal challenge of life makes the sun's golden glory pale by comparison.

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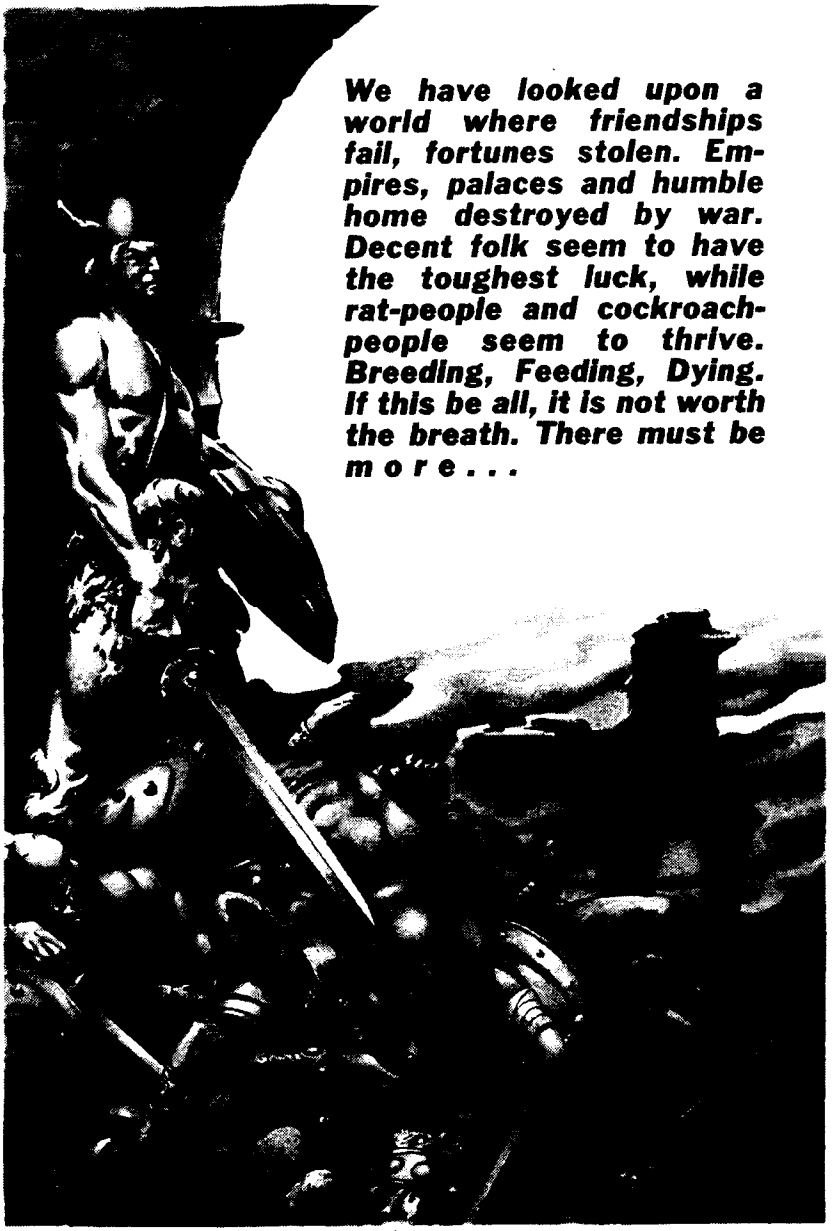

We have looked upon a world where friendships fail, fortunes stolen. Empires, palaces and humble home destroyed by war. Decent folk seem to have the toughest luck, while rat-people and cockroach-people seem to thrive. Breeding, Feeding, Dying. If this be all, it is not worth the breath. There must be m o r e . . .

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My eyes rest upon our blind watcher. He knows all the tricks of the demon's way. All their games, all their wiles. Slanted, unwilling eyes like black beads with lights behind them, he is blind, yet he sees everything with his mind. Like a gargoyle he squats, as old as time itself. His face a wrinkled leather mask, while inside his skull he works his wizardry. He is guardian of the ship. Nothing escapes his sightless eyes. He stands on guard by day and night keeping all evil things away.

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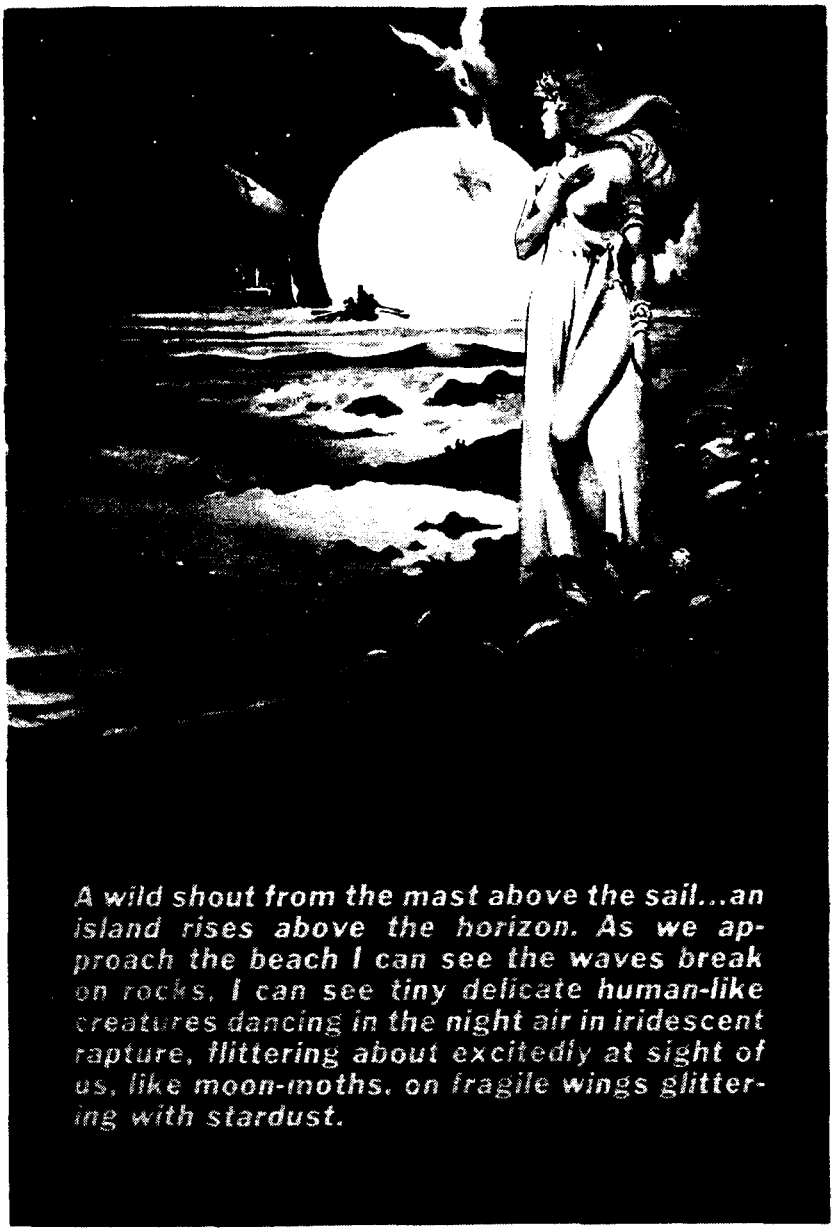

A wild shout from the mast above the sail...an island rises above the horizon. As we approach the beach I can see the waves break on rocks. I can see tiny delicate human-like creatures dancing in the night air in iridescent rapture, flittering about excitedly at sight of us, like moon-moths, on fragile wings glittering with stardust.

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Amid the curtains of blossoms and jungle vines pendant from giant trees, the foliage parts. Before us stands a woman of incredible beauty. Flesh of pale gold, wearing a robe of moon-mist sprinkled with jasmine stars whose perfume brings sweet delirium. Like a dream ecstasy she moves foward. Her troubled eyes search mine, her stride is hesitant. I look down at the sand where the moon throws my shadow up to meet her... and my blood freezes...she casts no shadow.

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FANTASTIC FACTS

WE ARE running out of room.

Just as countless SF stories have predicted, the world is becoming too small to support its teeming multitudes; we have no more empty continents to explore and colonize; raw materials and energy are being depleted at an alarming rate; and our environment is becoming burdened with pollutants.

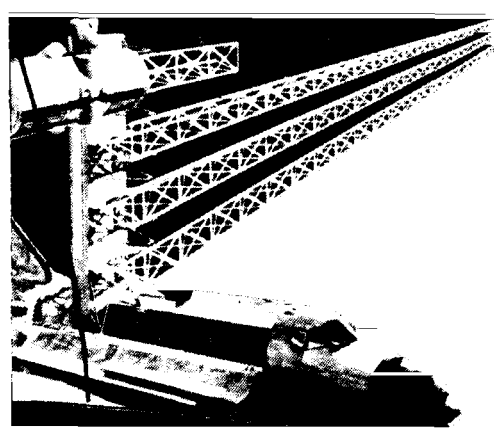
The obvious answer (as any good SF fan knows) is to expand the boundaries of our world into the frontiers of space. The expansion of earth-based industries beyond the limits of this planet will provide virtually infinite resources for energy, a limitless reservoir for waste and stimulation for creating many new products and services for mankind.

We have already begun this commercial expansion with the Communications Satellite Corporation (COMSAT) which has revolutionized worldwide communications. This tremendously successful joint government venture has already provided us with weather satellites and satellites for navigation, traffic control, mapping and surveying resources.

The development of the space shuttle will usher in a dramatic new stage in satellite services. It will make it possible to conduct assembly, repair, maintenance and checkout activities in space where we can build much bigger and more complex satellites. At the same time, ground-based user equipment will become tiny, simple, highly portable and inexpensive, opening the marvels of space to the average man on earth.

Millions of earth-based users can be serviced by only a few satellites. One industry proposal is for a Public Service Platform weighing 65,000 pounds and measuring 788 feet in length that would generate 500 kilo-

Space shuttle orbiter rigged with *automatic* beam builder for construction in space. Taking advantage of weightlessness, the shuttle will be able to build structures that are *miles* long.
Illustration: NASA



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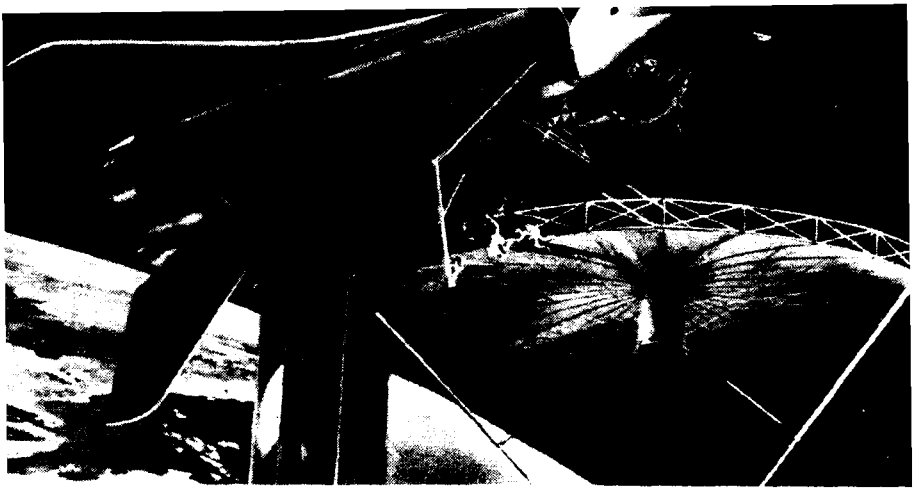

Sharklike space orbiter serving as construction base for workers erecting 110-foot diameter microwave antenna.
Illustration: NASA

watts of power via solar cells and use a total of 23 antennas measuring up to 60 feet in diameter. This orbiting wonder would provide U.S. citizens the following: educational broadcasts over five simultaneous TV channels for 16 hours a day; personal voice communication to 45,000 simultaneous users using wrist radios; national information services giving instant access to government, university and commercial data banks; teleconferencing on up to 150 simultaneous two-way TV channels; and electronic mail transmission at a rate of 40 million pages per day and overnight delivery from 800 sorting centers.

Manufacturing in space will benefit us in many ways. Not only will the weightless environment enhance production and quality, but it will increase output and reduce costs. There will be significant applications in the electronic and pharmaceutical industries, plus in materials, sciences, metallurgy, composite materials and new compound and alloy production.

There seems to be no earth-bound solution to our escalating energy problems. Space industrialization, however, can help solve these problems by providing technology useful to ground-generated and transmitted power; providing power reflectors in space for passively relaying electrical power from ground power plants to power users; and *generating power in space for transmission to the ground.* By the year 2000, solar energy satellites could provide tens of thousands

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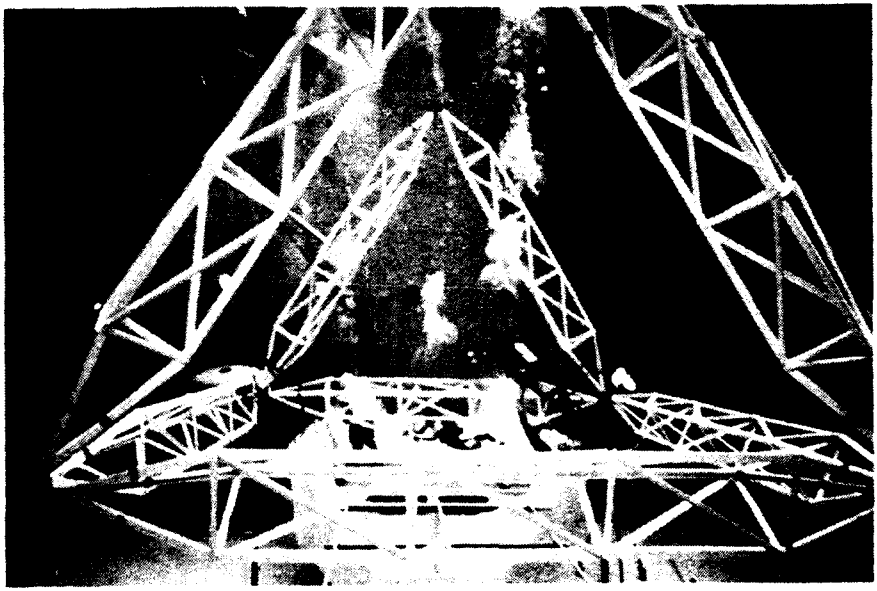

Underwater simulation of weightlessness allowing NASA researchers to experiment with techniques for building large structures in space. These tests are being conducted at NASA's Neutral Buoyancy Facility in Huntsville, Alabama.
Photo: NASA

Cutaway view of space shuttle in orbit, with Spacelab in its cargo bay. Spacelab, a joint venture of NASA and the European Space Agency, is a special module to be used for carrying out scientific experiments.
Illustration: NASA

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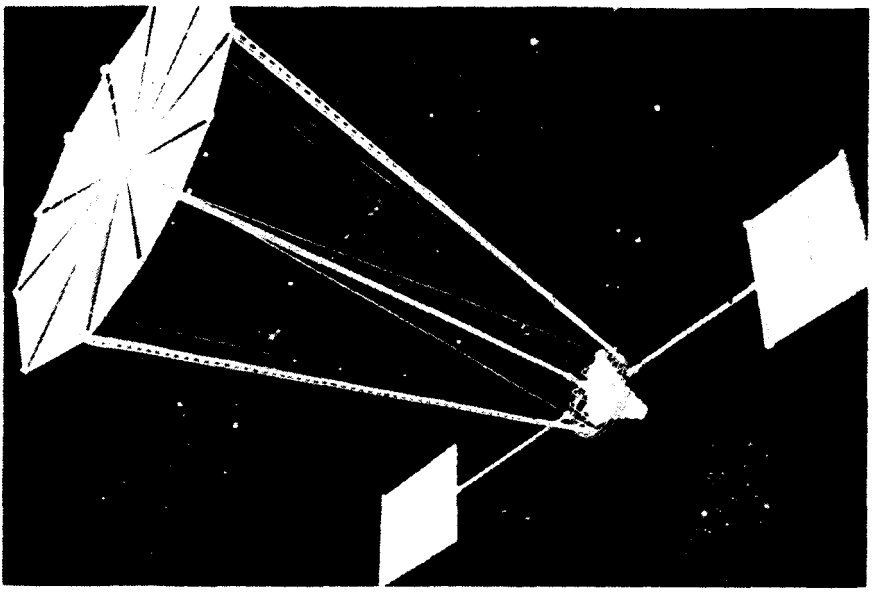

Personal communications satellites (which possibly could be in operation by 1990) like this one could handle up to 25 million users of a wrist-radio communications system. Multi-beam antenna, left, is 220 feet in diameter and can handle thousands of conversations simultaneously.
Illustration: NASA

of megawatts of electricity to our energy-starved cities, meeting perhaps up to 20% of the power requirements of the U.S. at that time.

The new era in space will stimulate social scientists to investigate socio/techno-cultural developments that may take place. Space industrialization will improve our lot on earth, but will require highly qualified people to *live* and *work in space*. The future will see large earth-orbiting and lunar-based space communities housing hundreds or even thousands of people.

Among human industries in space will be medical research, space science educational centers, space hospitals and sanitariums, entertainment and the arts and someday, perhaps even orbital vacation centers. The commercialization of space will stimulate world economic growth, making space colonization not only possible, but practical.

All of the developments now occurring will serve as mankind's stepping-stones into space — an expansion of our world which will be inevitable and *necessary for sheer survival.*

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by Romuald M. Tallip

Illustrated by Raven

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BEYOND THE elm-encircled river, lies a district dismal and dark with archaic arbors, strange foliage, and haunted flowers the size of men. I, Zan Malebus, a merchant, dealing in armory, had stumbled upon the blasphemous grove when making my way to Ultarith City with a cart full of ornate blades and newly fashioned weaponry. I became detoured by the unexpected shattering, and eventual submerging of the river bridge; just as I was sighting it from the crest of the hill, an extremely vicious meteor storm came crashing down with a dread violence against the large, wooden supporting planks. Terrified, I watched the rumbling tiers sail into the black, wild water, carrying with them the feeble remains of an astonished traveler.

I cut a path through the tall weeds growing on the slope of my hill, and left my cart upon its top. I knew that the traveler was certainly dead, and having an inclination to reach the city before the horrid nightfall, I ventured to trail the river, hoping to find some shallow place where I could wade across with my merchandise, stuffed in burlap sacks upon my shoulders. After several crossings I would at least have my weapons on the other side, although I would surely lose my cart to the prey of some 'needy' villager.

Unharnessing my Tamuron ox, I led him to the swift flowing river. The ox was of the short and stout species, renowed for their speediness as well as for their massively muscled shoulders. Unfortunately, they also possessed a morbid dread of water, and I would have to struggle with the creature to get him across. Never would I have been so unwise as to let him carry my costly parcels strapped upon the large hump of his black-furred back, as surely he would tilt them all into the drink by all his frantic movement and bellowing.

Upon reaching the thorny bank, we followed the river's weirdly winding course through all manner of drooping fern; exorbitant, blue-streaked flowers, and tightly knitted byways of clinging vines and semi-leafless boughs. Thicker and thicker we dared to enter the briars, separating milk-spitting weeds and sun-dry foliage. I led the animal on, stopping only momentarily to remove the coarse knots of bramble which had irritatingly attached themselves to the ox's fur.

Night was falling fast; forcing to my remembrance the eerie, morbid legends that the peasant folk had whispered of concerning the river area and the sunsetted outskirts of bleak Ultarith. I did not consider myself to be either a very religious man, attaching no great importance to the gods of the city or their demon counterparts, nor was I much given over to the wild superstitions possessed by the common folk, but I have felt a strange, unanswerable sensation whenever my business drew me to these unwholesome parts.

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It was well known, from reliable facts rather than from the mere hearsay of the villagers, that this melancholy area had well over its grim share of suicides spawned from the mad lingering auras of dark necromancies and unnamable conjurings. Rumors had readily spread fantastic tales of the Dead walking, soft as wind rippling placid upon a pool, then bursting into feverish, laughter-like shrieks while exhibiting mortal wounds from under the uplifted folds of their blood-dappled shrouds. I, of course, could not give credence to these utterings, but the aura of this place *seemed* to invoke some sinister deeds still incarnate within these damnable woods.

THE SOGGY ground began to mist, probably due to the presence of the swishing river clashing with the cool, early-autumnal air. This mortuary dampness seemed to have stirred every hideous-throated bullfrog into a nocturnal gaity. They were, in turn, joined by the fidgety splashings of red striped salamanders, of the kind called 'moonbathers,' who were approaching the moist stone slabs jetting from the saturnine-dark river's surface. Above glided the wings of shadowy whipporwills, clamoring as they went, morose and wraith-like melodies.

We plodded on amid these ceaseless sounds, till my ears were throbbing nearly into numbness from their chaotic murmurings. The ground also became a source of alarming annoyance, for it was gradually growing murkier and softer with every pressing step. Eventually, to my dismay, we were unable to proceed any further, and had to either retrack our steps or take to the deeper woods bordering ominously on our right hand side, until the ground around the river became more solid again. I chose the latter maneuver, leading the weary, nervous ox through a break in the forest thicket.

Instantly, my face and hands were assailed by a horde of savage mosquitoes, pricking with all their pesky might into whatever area of my flesh they preferred. Also, those tiny dizzy flies which hover in spiral circles over the warm and sweaty bodies of men, appeared in full force, getting sometimes into my throat or eyes, with their reckless motion.

We pressed on, noticing that the ground was forming a sharp slant upwards. Then to my sudden and total astonishment, I beheld a wondrous wild garden, almost tropical in design with all its many huge and alien foliages, wide-mouthed flowerbells, and endless trails of curling vine. To my complete dumbfoundment, the chilling climate had also transformed into a shimmering, temperate environment whose warm, whispering breezes mimicked those of the sweet perfumed, Siren-haunted seas. Amazed, I dropped the ox's leash, and almost somnambulistically walked over to the lavishly blossoming head-high buds to stroke their purple, rich, velvety petals. Even the ox followed

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me to capture a greater whiff of their supernatural fragrance.

I noted that not even one insect had offensively stirred since we had entered this luxuriant garden. No sound was heard either, except for a sort of pleasant, 'cooing' drone coming from some unknown vicinity among the giant trees. It was as if an omnipotent, opiate pollen had drowsed the place to rest by means of sweet narcotic winds, whispering terrible, lovely melodies unheard before by human ear, and through exotic, vine-sculptured visions never witnessed by mortal eye nor read of in all the various tomes on floral wondery.

Enthralled with an awe mingling with a caution for their alienness, I approached a massive stalk whereon grew strange buds the size of at least two human heads. Yet, as I was preparing to touch the resplendently violet cone of one of the towering flowers, I experienced a ghostly chill which made me to withdraw my grasping hand. It had placed a terribly disturbing sensation in my mind which I could not even attempt to describe.

I took a few steps backward, away from the plant, but noticed that the intoxicated ox was beginning to protrude his nose into the scented petals, invading the flower's intimacy. Simultaneous with his sniffing, he began to tremble as if being overtaken by a ghastly fridgedness, producing a listless mortification of his limbs, and a stupefying slumber in his mind. Bedazzled as to what was happening, he tearfully observed the flowerbell begin to assume a monstrous proportion, still retaining his snout within the tightening folds of its many jawed petals! It grew to the size of a Titan, consuming the ox's head and attempting to draw the rest of his body inside its hideous bell!

I ran instinctively forward to help free the ox, whether this was an impulse arising from my need of him or from a feeling of outrage done to a fellow 'walking' creature, I can not be certain.

It had happened so suddenly, so very suddenly, that my bewitched mind was swirling with a thousand phrases of incoherent terror. I didn't even think to remove a gleaming weapon from one of the burlap sacks! I merely seized upon the tranquil ox's hind legs and started to pull frantically! Of course, this was to little avail, although my adrenalin was keyed up into a feverish surge of strength. As I persisted in my efforts, a massive, flexible tendril of the plant, rippled up my leg, coiling around it with a clasp of iron. Instantly, another bud swung down with open jaws, and pierced the sinews of my straining shoulders.

Blood ran down my robust arms, and drizzled in fevered drops upon my legs. My loin cloth became soaked with the crimson drippage.

In a moment it was over. The ox was eaten, and I was flung down hard unto the misting ground. I think that my eyes were closed for some time, but I am not sure. The fall had winded me, and the strange opiate

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air had dazed my mind to all accurate conceptions of time.

YET WHEN I woke, if in truth I had passed out at all, I beheld an obnoxiously mystical and depressing sight. The buds had opened and from out of them stepped ghostly humans, or demons, or wraiths of the damned, devoured Dead. I sat up, observing them to deduce their intentions.

They were dressed in long, white, misting gowns, that hideously matched the powdery whiteness of their complexions. The smoothness of their fluidly-gesturing arms was as the white conch shells found in remote, Orient seas. Their lips were red as the ruby flowers growing at their slow-moving feet. Some did not seem to concern themselves at all with my presence. These creatures agilely crept up to infant flower beds to weed them; place small, violet bulbs within the black topsoil; or sprinkle some unknown fluid upon them, gathered from the tearing sap of the elder plants.

But several of the others encircled me in a crescent formation. I can still hear their rapid breath, mingling with the sighing wind. Their approach did not seem sinister. It felt as if some strangely picturesque dream that pleases the sleeper (but startles him when waking, he recounts it), had descended, inviting me to participate in its unfolding.

One morbidly-beautiful female, whose hair was as dark as the deepest orchids known to man, knelt by me and spoke into my dreaming face, wispy words of a distant but 'near to me' manner.

"You have come into the great abode of our lord Yo, the plant demon. Few, if any, have witnessed His glory and left it to return to the mortal realms. None had wished to depart from the tranquil blossoms growing in this wild, luxuriant hollow. Here, sip upon this trickling blood, flowing from my delicately opened wound. It will give you tastes of things long unguessed by mortal men."

With these words, she had presented me with one of her slender, pale wrists, running with a little streamlet of blood, and sensuously bade me to drink. I know that this will sound grotesque to unenlightened ears, but I sipped the blood with a tremendous feeling of joy coursing through my entire mind and body. I did not even think of it as blood, no more than one would in an obscurely moving dream, but lapped its scarlet flavor with a strange sensation of intimate belonging. I swear, that as a symbolic dream has queer ways of speaking the most romantic things to one, so did her touch and fevered blood greet me with wondrous joy; a surge of pleasant 'spiritual' relief, rather than with feelings of perverted obscenities.

The air was swaying with the delicious sounds of gentle oboe melodies, piping images into my mind of blue-emerald alien gardens, pink

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misty landscapes where lord Yo had reigned since yore, and beautiful flower-spirited kingdoms, primordial with sprawling roots and water-falling cliffs, delicate as threads of winter light spun on looms of universal Night.

Poetic songs rippled in my head, though my tongue was numb to say them. And the more I tasted of her blood, the more I could perceive these 'visions,' sounds, and her own sweet voice, which was becoming intense and nearly telepathic.

"You may, if you wish," she continued with a voluptuous sigh, "aid us in the Ritual of Planting."

I nodded my consent, lifting her delicate fingers to my lips, tenderly kissing them with my hazy, swooning breath. I did not know the nature of this ritual, but it would have hardly mattered, so intoxicated had I become with the female and her dreamy aura that I was willing to perform anything.

She whispered that her name was Lunathe', as she led me to the crescent formation to join the other devotees of Yo.

From out of a dense cluster of vine, two jewel-dressed maidens in scanty priestess garb brought forth the green-white slabs of an altar's

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marble sides. Three nude 'men,' clad only in decorative leaves wound about their sensuously white arms, assisted the maids and also brought out the altar's glistening top, which was the milky chartreuse color resembling the Spring growth of infant sapplings. Together they erected the altar in the middle of the alien grove. Their movements were extremely swift, accomplishing the task in but a fraction of minutes.

Upon the altar's surface was placed a small, silver brazier, which resembled a skull with a dangerous bud growing from its top. Inside the bud was inserted a peculiar incense, which smoldered with an intensely vaporous purple smoke.

The two priestesses separated the encircling throng of twenty devotees, and made their wispy way up to the altar's front. With solemn gestures they began to incant, staring at the brilliant constellations trailing in the pitch black sky.

"Hear us, o Yo, magnificent Demon, lord of myriad glories, emperor of that which comes from the dark, deep soil and of that which returns to it. We are the Night Children of Yo, come to plant Thy infant seeds. O, do aid us, we beseech Thee! We evoke Thee under Thy swirling stars! Attend us! Aid us! This is for Thy glory! And may prosperity be upon our adopted father, Zapor, that devil-priest who hath brought forth Thy unhallowed seeds from dark, distant galaxies, planting them, and allowing their infernal pollens to blow where they will. Hear us, o Yo, by these mighty Names . . ."

The rest of their excited speech was unintelligible to me, as it was pronounced in a dire language that shrieked with preterhuman syllables of dark primordial sorceries used in demon worlds.

After this solemnly wild recitation, Lunathe', holding head-high the first of the bulbs to be planted, paced to the altar amid a mad, fevered beat of large conical drums carved from tree trunks, and a weird fluting of shrill reed pipes. Arriving there with a dreamy look upon her eyes, she opened her flowing argent gown, exposing her death-white, voluptuous breasts. A priestess did the same. They clasped each other tightly while mumbling strange incantations and holding the bulb between their ruby nipples. They swayed in a kind of lesbian love, murmuring savage praises to Yo. The three men came up to them with wooden bowls filled with uncanny sap dyes, and proceeded to trace arabesque sigils upon the girls' bodies. Hauntingly, I recall the brilliant red and blue patterns being etched upon their flesh as they swayed to the obscene music. Lunathe' was smiling in intoxicated glee as she coiled herself in the trembling priestess' arms. Surprisingly enough, their bodies did not glisten from perspiration of their passion, but retained their smooth ethereal dryness, like the bodies of teardrop jewels.

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The other devotees were beginning to dance while some of them clawed the black, fertile soil, with their open hands. Taken over by the vigorous air, I rejoiced, and joined them, plunging my own hands into the deep, moist ground. I smiled to Lunathe' as she watched me, both amazed and pleased.

SUDDENLY, A wild crack of branches assailed the air! We all turned with sinister slanted eyes and violence pounding in our hearts, to the direction of the disturbing sound.

Crashing through a briar opening came several military captains of Ultarith's warlord force. The reality of their mundane steps, partially shook my mind from the trance and, terrified, I nearly wept to see the muddy soil oozing from between my blackened fingers, and the fevered insanity now in motion.

I was bewildered as to how the warlords had found us. Later I was to learn that they had been to the bridge to ascertain its destruction, and had found my cart upon the hill. I had engraved upon my cart's wooden front plate my trademark; a skull above a rose, meaning 'peace through death of enemy.' This they had regarded as highly suspicious, thinking me a passing mercenary involved in some dire conspiracy, having found with my emblem a few blades that I had neglected to take, or else deeming me a fatal wizard, sent to demolish the bridge through darkly potent magics. My path was easy to trail, due to the tall weeds I had flattened and the muddy tracks near the riverway. Never did they expect to stumble upon this horror, but they raced into the fray disregarding their hearts' fear.

The huge warriors swept over the place with savage swishing blades and vulgar curses. Although astonished, the devotees did not retreat, but came at them with a might spawned from demons. The air was seething with panic. Everywhere the soil was shaded with someone's blood. Some warriors were beheaded by the fanged jaws of dangling plants which had looped around their unsuspecting necks, and snapped their heads from their bodies with one abrupt swallow.

Three vicious warlords confronted Lunathe', following her down the slope towards the river. I ran frantically after them. The very sight of beholding some male, human hand upon Lunathe' revolted me into a frenzy of a demon. Perhaps it was from her blood that I had sipped, linking us together, or more likely from the throbbing calling of my heart.

COMING TO the river, I saw Lunathe' attempting to cross it by shakily wading from one large, smooth stone to the next. I had seen that her route was impossible because the rocks stopped short of the

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river's other side. Obviously in her fear, she had just dashed upon them as the nearest way of keeping distant from the warriors. Her white, slender legs were smudged with mud. She must have fallen many times in her struggle on the bank. Tears were brimming in her azure eyes and her breathing was too deep to grasp the air of life. A soldier was already clawing at her arm.

With a deadly wail, I clashed with the scarlet warriors, stabbing one to the agonizing folds of death with a blade I had picked up along my run. I seized another by the shoulder, attempting to fling him to the mucky ground, but he was too robustly built and merely lost balance,

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arising before he even touched the ground. He swung back venomously. We struggled, splashing into the black, swirling river, but not before I had succeeded in toppling the other warrior in with us.

Through the gurgling waves and blur of flying fists, I had seen Lunathe', standing atop the very rock that we were swimming beneath, tearfully looking at my efforts. Suddenly, she picked up a soldier's fallen sword and whipped it through his neck which was hovering over the approaching waves. Astonished, I struggled with the other warlord with greater effort.

I remember Lunathe''s stretching hand trying to reach me. We were so close, from where she stood upon the rock and me swirling beneath it, that I felt her cold tears fall upon my face. I remember the blur of the soldier's fist and then there was nothing.

Upon waking, I realized that the warrior had dragged me to the opposite bank, and was now kneeling over me, informing me that I had been a victim of an 'unnatural' spell. My mind was clearing quickly, as I looked up into his sober face. I felt, at once, a repulsion and a gratitude. Somehow, from my confused state of heart, I had managed to thank him for saving me from the 'awful' curse, and smiling, I patted his huge mailed shoulder. He returned the smile and speedily attended to our wounds.

Soon we were joined by the other soldiers who informed us of the untraceable escape of the mad 'specters.' This information delighted me, although I didn't know why it should, and I certainly did not show any trace of my strange emotion to the annoyed warlords.

We started for Ultarith, leaving the sentiments of each man unspoken. I was helped along by several soldiers until we reached the road near the bridge. From then on I could walk, a little stiffly, along the smooth, dusty lane leading to the safety of the city.

I STAYED in Ultarith for two weeks, at the alternate houses of fellow merchant friends. Yet, tonight I am staying at the Drazgon Inn, gathering more information from travelers and village folk concerning a new rumor whispered about Yothlant Hollow.

Inwardly I sneer when I see their foolish faces buckle with wrinkles formed by fear when they speak of the Hollow. Tonight I am leaving cold Ultarith forever, along with the calling fears that have given me nightmares of a hideous and colorful sort for the past two weeks. No longer will my lips chill at the pronunciation of the dreadful words, 'Yothlant Hollow,' for I have heard that a white, Tamuron ox now haunts the woods with fevered wounds and tranquil sighs. And he is tended by a strange, orchid-tressed woman whom the winds call Lunathe'.

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Dreams of victory over aliens ruling the earth fill the mind of Tumithak, who is considered mad to entertain such visions. Can he alone rekindle man's pride and fighting spirit?

Illustrated by Chris Carlson

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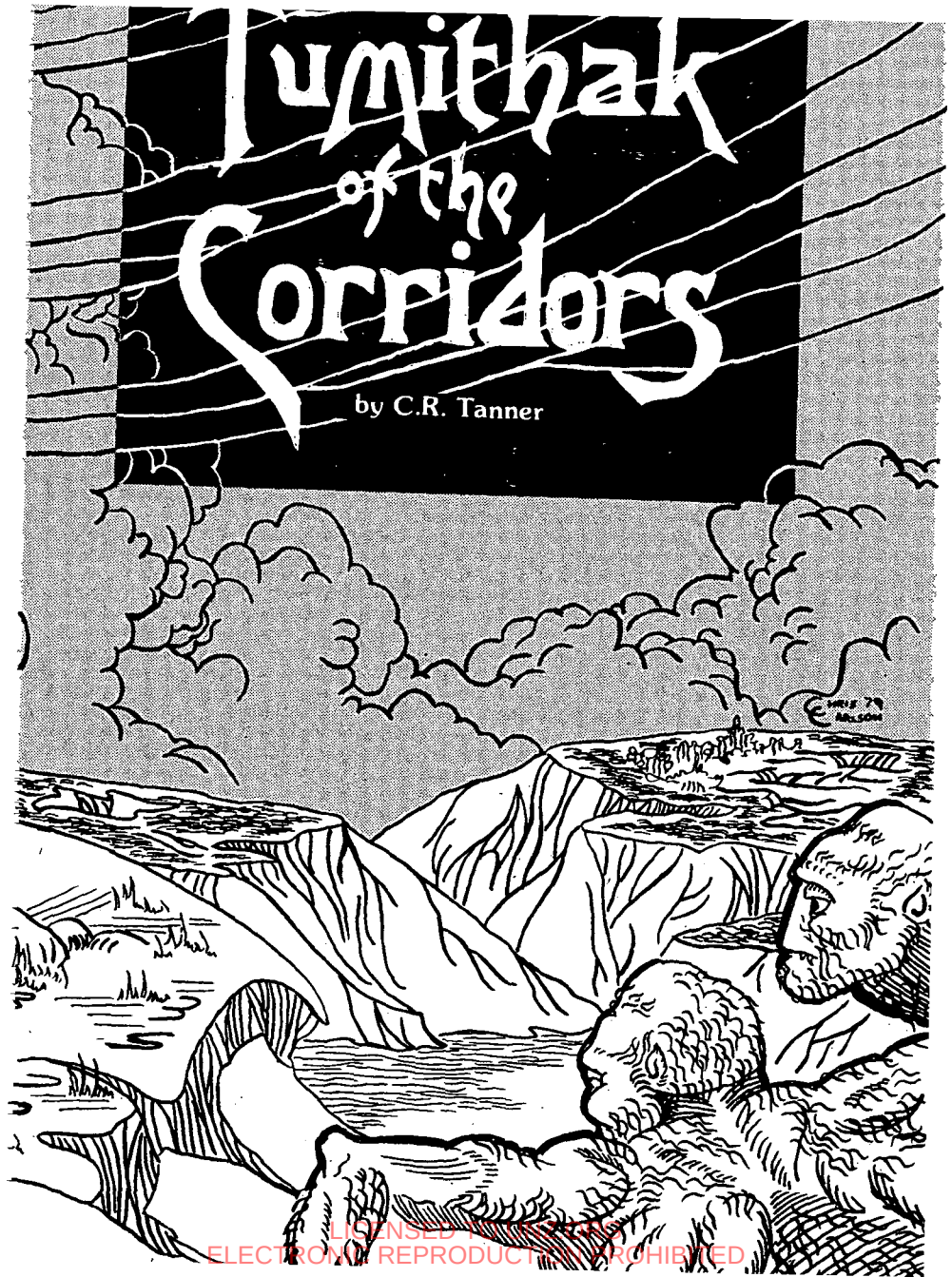

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Foreword

IT IS only within the last few years that archeological science has reached a point where we may begin to appreciate the astonishing advances in science that our ancestors had achieved before the Great Invasion. Excavations in the ruins of London and New York have been especially prolific in yielding knowledge of the life that those ancestors led. That they possessed the secret of flying, and a knowledge of chemistry and electricity far beyond ours is now certain; and there is even some evidence that they surpassed us in medicine and some of the arts. Taking their civilization as a whole, it is quite doubtful if we have even yet surpassed them in general knowledge.

Until the time of the Invasion, their discoveries of the secrets of Nature seem to have been made steadily in regular geometric progression, and we have good cause to believe that it was the people of earth who first solved the secret of interplanetary flight. The many romances that have been written by novelists dealing with this time, testify to the interest which we of today take in the history of what we call the Golden Age.

But the present story deals neither with the days of the Invasion, nor with life as it was in the Golden Age before it. It tells instead of the life of that semi-mythical, semi-historical character, Tumithak of Loor, who, legend tells us, was the first man to rebel against the savage shelks. Although innumerable facts are still lacking, recent investigations in the Pits and Corridors have thrown much light on what was obscure in this hero's life. That he really lived and fought is now certain to be true; that he accomplished the miracles accredited to him by legend is just as certain to be untrue.

We can feel sure, for instance, that he never lived for the two hundred and fifty years that are ascribed to him; that his wonderful strength and imperviousness to the rays of the shelks are mythical, as are doubtless the stories of his destruction of the six cities.

But our knowledge of his life increases as our credibility in the legends decreases, and the time has come when we can grasp dimly, but with a more rational viewpoint, the truth about his deeds. So, in this tale, the author makes an attempt to rationalize, to place properly in its historical setting, the early life of a great hero who dared to strike boldly for Mankind, in the days when the Beasts of Venus held all the earth in thrall . . .

AS FAR as eye could see, the long, somber corridor extended. Fifteen feet high and as many wide it ran, on and on, its brown, glassy walls presenting an unvarying sameness. At intervals along the center line of the ceiling, large glowering lights appeared, flat plates of cool,

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white luminescence that had shone without attention for centuries. At intervals equally frequent, were deep-cut doors, draped with a rough, burlap-like cloth, their sills worn down by the passing generations of feet. Nowhere was the monotony of the scene broken, except where the corridor was crossed by another of equal simplicity.

The passage was by no means deserted. Here and there, throughout its length, scattered figures appeared — men, for the most part blue-eyed and red-haired and dressed in rough burlap tunics that were gathered at the waist by wide, pocketed belts with enormous buckles. A few women were also in evidence, differing from the men in the length of their hair and tunics. All moved with a furtive, slinking air, for though it was many years since the Terror had been seen, the habits of a hundred generations were not easily thrown off. And so the hall, its frequenters, their clothes and even their habits combined to complete the somber monotone.

From somewhere far below this corridor came the steady beat and throb of some gigantic machine; a beat that continued unceasingly and was so much a part of the life of these people that it was only with difficulty that they could be brought to notice it at all. Yet its beat bore down on them, penetrated their minds, and, with its steady rhythm, affected all that they did.

One part of the hall seemed to be more populous than any other. The lights here glowed brighter, the cloths that covered the doorways were cleaner and newer, and many more people appeared. Sneaking in and out of the doorways they went, for all the world like rabbits engaged in some big business enterprise.

Out of one of the side doorways a boy and girl appeared. About fourteen years of age, they were exceptionally tall for children, apparently having already reached their full growth, though their immaturity was evident. They, too, like their elders, were blue-eyed and red-haired; a complexion due to the eternal lack of sunshine and lifelong exposure to the rays of the corridor lights. There was a certain boldness and quickness about them that caused many of the folk of the corridor to frown disapprovingly as they passed. One could see that these older ones felt that the younger generation was fast riding to destruction. Certainly, sooner or later, this boldness and loudness would bring down the Terror from the Surface.

But, sublimely indifferent to the disapproval that was so in evidence around them, the two youngsters continued upon their way. They turned from the main corridor into one less brilliantly lighted, and after traversing it for nearly a mile, turned into another. The hall in which they now found themselves was narrow and inclined upward at a

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decided angle. It was entirely deserted, and the thick dust and neglected condition of the lights showed that it was long since men had lived here. The many doorways were without the draped curtains that concealed the interior of the inhabited apartments in the larger corridors; but many of the doorways were almost entirely covered with draperies of cobwebs laden with dust. The girl drew closer to the boy as they continued up the passage; but aside from this she showed no sign of fear. After some time, the passageway grew steeper, and at last ended in a cul-de-sac. The two seated themselves in the rubble that littered the floor and presently began to talk in a low tone.

"It must have been years since men have come here," said the girl, softly. "Perhaps we will find something of great value which was left here when men deserted this corridor."

"I think Tumithak is too hopeful when he tells us of possible treasures in these halls," answered the boy. "Surely there have been men in these halls, searching as we are, since they were abandoned."

"Tumithak should be here by now," the girl said, after a while. "Do you think he will come?" Her eyes strove vainly to pierce the gloom down the hallway.

"Why, of course, he will come, Thupra," said her companion. "Has Tumithak ever failed to meet us as he promised?"

"But to come here, alone!" protested Thupra. "I should die of fright, Nikadur, if you weren't here."

"There isn't really any danger here," he said. "The men of Yakra could never enter these halls without passing through the main corridor. And many, many years have passed since Loor has seen a shelk."

"Grandfather Koniak once saw a shelk," reminded Thupra.

"Yes, but not here in Loor. He saw it in Yakra, years ago, when he fought the Yakrans as a young man. Remember, the Loorians were successful in their campaign against the Yakrans and drove them out of their city and into the corridors beyond. And then suddenly there was flame and terror, and a band of shelks appeared. Grandfather Koniak saw but one, and that one almost caught him before he escaped." Nikadur smiled. "It is a wonderful tale, but I think we have only Grandfather Koniak's word for it."

"But really, Nikadur —" the girl was beginning, when she was interrupted by a rustling noise from one of the web-hung doorways. Like a flash, boy and girl both leapt to their feet and sped in panic down the passage without so much as a single glance backward. They were totally unaware of the youth who had stepped from the doorway and who was now leaning against the wall, watching their flight with a

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cynical smile on his face.

At a glance, this youth seemed not unlike the others who lived in the corridors. The same red hair and clear translucent skin, the same rough tunic and enormous belt characterized this lad as it did all the others of Loor. But the discerning eye would have noticed in the immense brow, the narrow, hooked nose and the keen eyes, a promise of the greatness that was to someday be his.

The boy watched his fleeing friends for a moment and then gave a low, bird-like whistle. Thupra stopped suddenly and turned around, and then, seeing the newcomer, called to Nikadur. The boy stopped his flight, too, and together they returned, rather shamefaced, to the end of the passage.

"You frightened us, Tumithak," said the girl, reproachfully. "What in the world were you doing in that room? Weren't you afraid to go in there alone?"

"Nothing is in there to hurt me," answered Tumithak, loftily. "Often I have browsed around through these corridors and apartments and never yet have I seen any living thing, save the spiders and the bats. I was seeking for forgotten things," he went on, and his eyes grew suddenly brighter. "And look! I have found a book!" And, reaching into the bosom of his tunic, he drew forth his prize and exhibited it proudly to the others.

"This is an *old* book," he said. "See?"

It certainly was an old book. The cover was gone, more than half the leaves were missing, and the thin metal sheets of which the leaves were composed were even beginning to oxidize on the edges. Certainly, this book had been lying forgotten for centuries.

Nikadur and Thupra looked at it in awe; the awe that an illiterate person naturally holds for all the mysteries of the magic black marks that transmit thoughts. But Tumithak could read. He was the son of Tumlook, one of the food men; the men who held the secret of preparing the synthetic food that these people lived on. These food men, as well as the doctors and the light and power men, retained many of the secrets of the wisdom of their ancestors. Foremost among these secrets was the very necessary art of reading; and as Tumithak was intended to follow in his father's footsteps, Tumlook had early trained him in this wonderful art.

So, after the two had looked at the book and held it in their hands, they beseeched Tumithak to read it to them. Often, they had listened in wide-eyed wonder as he read to them from some of the rare works the food men owned, and they never wasted a chance to watch the apparently mystifying process of changing the queer marks on the

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metal sheets into sounds and sentences.

Tumithak smiled at their importuning, and then, because secretly he was as anxious as they to know what the long-forgotten script contained, he motioned them to be seated on the floor beside him, and opening the book, began to read:

"The manuscript of Davon Staros; written at Pitmouth, Sol 22nd, in the year of the Invasion 161, or in the old style — A.D. 3218."

Tumithak paused.

"That *is* an old book," whispered Nikadur in an awed voice, and Tumithak nodded.

"Nearly two thousand years!" he answered, "I wonder what the figures A.D. 3218 stand for?"

He puzzled over the book for a moment and then resumed his reading.

"I am an old man, and one who can remember the day when men still dared to fight for liberty. It is indeed a bitter thing to see how the race has fallen.

"There is growing these days a hopeless superstition to the effect that man can never conquer, and must never attempt to even battle with the shelks. It is to combat this superstition that the author here writes the story of the conquest of earth, in the hope that at some future time, a man will arise who will have the courage to face the conquerors of Man and again do battle. In the hope that this man will appear and that he may know the creatures against whom he fights, this story is written.

"The scientists who tell of the days before the Invasion, inform us that man was once little more than a beast. Through thousands of years he gradually worked his way upward to civilization, learning the arts of living, until he conquered all the world for his own.

"He learned the secret of producing food from the very elements themselves, he learned the secret of imitating the life-giving light of the sun, his great airships sped through the atmosphere as easily as his watership sped through the seas. Wonderful, disintegrating rays dissolved the hills that stood in his way, and as a result, long canals brought water from the ocean to inaccessible deserts, making them blossom like earth's most fertile regions. From pole to pole, man's mighty cities grew, and from pole to pole man was supreme.

"For thousands of years, men quarreled among themselves, and great wars tore the earth, until at last their civilization reached a point where these wars ceased. A great era of peace settled down; the earth, sea and land alike were conquered by man, and he began to look out to the other worlds that swung about the sun, wondering if these, too,

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might not be conquered.

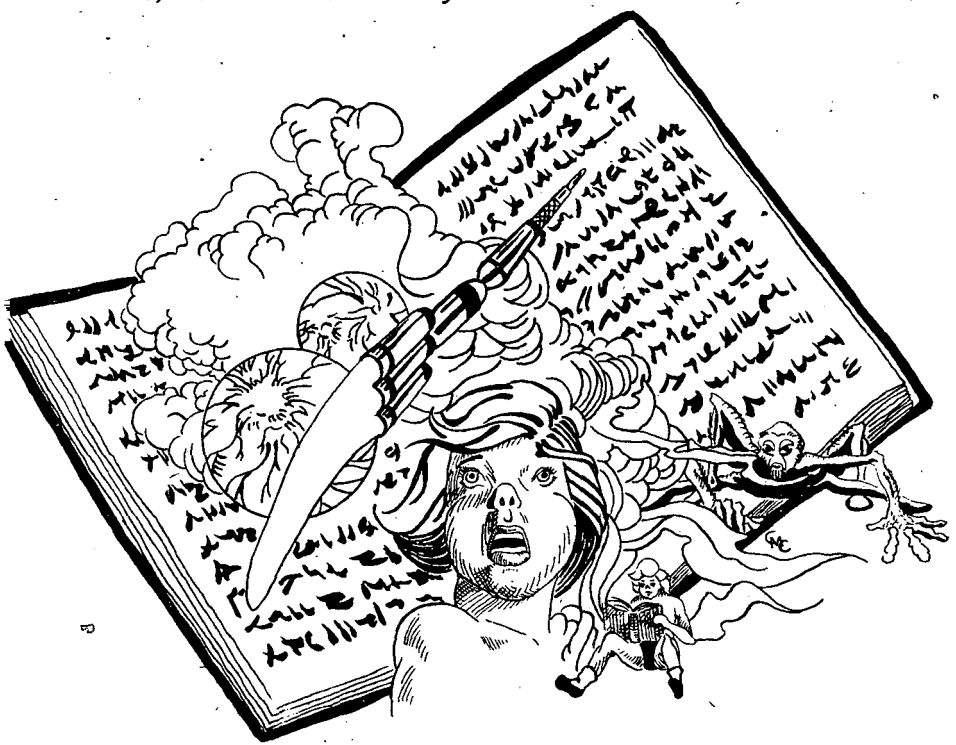
"It was many centuries before they learned enough to attempt a journey into the depths of space. A way had to be found to avoid the countless meteors that filled the paths between the planets. A way had to be found to insulate against the deadly cosmic rays. It seemed that no sooner was one difficulty overcome than another arose to take its place. But one after another the difficulties in the way of interplanetary flight disappeared, and at last the day came when a mighty vessel, hundreds of feet long, lay ready to leap into space to explore the other worlds."

Tumithak again paused in his reading.

"It must be a wonderful secret," he said. "I seem to be reading words, but I do not know what they mean. Someone is going somewhere, but that's about all I can make of it. Shall I go on?"

"Yes! Yes!" they cried; so he continued:

"It was under the command of a man named Henric Sudiven; and, of all the great company that manned it, only he returned to the world of men to tell of the terrible adventures that they met with on the planet Venus, the world to which they traveled.



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"The trip to Venus was a highly successful one, and quite uneventful. Week after week passed, while the evening star, as men called it, grew ever brighter and larger. The ship worked perfectly, and though the journey was a long one to those who were used to crossing an ocean in a single night, the time did not hang heavy on their hands. The day came when they sailed over the low, rolling plains and broad valleys of Venus, under the thick mantle of clouds that forever hides the surface of that planet from the sun, and marveled at the great cities and works of civilization that were in evidence everywhere.

"After hovering over a great city for some time, they landed and were welcomed by the strange, intelligent creatures that ruled over Venus; the same creatures that we know today by the name of shelks. The shelks thought them demi-gods and would have worshipped them; but Sudiven and his companions, true products of earth's noblest culture, scorned to deceive; and when they had learned the language of the shelks, told them quite truthfully just who they were and from whence they came.

"The astonishment of the shelks knew no bounds. They were skilled far more than men in mechanical science; their knowledge of electricity and chemistry was quite as great; but astronomy and its kindred sciences were totally unknown to them. Imprisoned as they were under the eternal canopy of clouds that hides forever the sight of outer space, they had never dreamed of other worlds than the one they knew; and it was only with difficulty that they were at last persuaded that Sudiven's story was true.

"But, once convinced, the attitude of the shelks underwent a decided change. No longer were they deferential and friendly. They suspected that man had come only to conquer them and they determined to beat him at his own game. There was a certain lack of the more humane feelings in the make-up of the shelks, and they were quite unable to conceive of a friendly visit from strangers of another world.

"The Tellurians soon found themselves locked up in a great metal tower many miles from their space flier. In a moment of carelessness, one of Sudiven's companions had let drop the remark that this flier was the only one yet built upon the earth, and the shelks decided to take advantage of this fact, to begin at once the conquest of earth.

"They took possession of the Tellurians' vessel, and with that unity of purpose that is so characteristic of the shelks and so lacking in man, began the construction of a vast number of similar machines. All over the planet, the great machine shops hummed and clattered with the noise of the work; and while the earth awaited the triumphal return of her explorers, the day of her doom drew nearer and nearer.

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"But Sudiven and the other Tellurians, locked up in their tower, had not given up to despair. Time after time, they attempted to escape, and there is no doubt but that the shelks would have slain them to a man, had they not hoped to extract further knowledge from them before they killed them. For once the shelks were in error; they should have slain the Tellurians, every one; for about a week before the date set for the departure of the shelks' great fleet of machines, Sudiven and about a dozen of his companions managed to escape.

"At terrific risk they made their way across the country to the place where their space car lay. An idea can be had of the dangers of the journey when one realizes that on Venus, that is, on the inhabited side, it is always day. There was no concealing night to enable the Tellurians to travel without hope of discovery. But, at last, they came upon their car, guarded only by a few unarmed shelks. The battle that ensued is one that should go down in man's history, to inspire him in all the ages to come. When it was over, the shelks were all dead and only seven men were left to man the space-flier on its journey back to earth.

"For weeks, the great bullet-shaped flier sped across the vast emptiness of space and, at last, landed upon the earth. Sudiven alone remained alive when it landed; the others had succumbed to some strange disease, a disease that had been given to them by the shelks.

"But Sudiven was alive and remained alive long enough to warn the world. Faced with this sudden terror, the world had little time for any but defensive measures. The construction of vast underground pits and caverns was begun at once, the intention being to construct great underground cities, in which man could hide himself and from which he could emerge to conquer his enemies at his leisure. But before they were well started, the shelks arrived and the war was on!

"Never, in the days when man warred with man, had anyone dreamed of a war like this. The shelks had arrived by the millions; it was estimated that fully two hundred thousand space cars took part in the invasion. For days, man's defensive measures kept the shelks from gaining a landing space on the earth; they were forced to fly far above the surface, dropping their deadly gases and explosives where they could. From his subterranean halls, man sent up vast quantities of gases as deadly as those of the shelks, and their disintegrating rays sent hundreds of the space-cars into nothingness, killing off the shelks like flies. And from their fliers, the shelks dropped vast quantities of flaming chemicals into the pits that men had dug, chemicals that burned with terrific violence and exhausted the oxygen of the caverns, causing men to perish by the thousands.

"As men found themselves defeated by the shelks, they drove

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deeper and deeper into the earth, their wonderful disintegrators dissolving the rock almost as fast as a person could walk through the corridor it dug. Men were forced from the Surface at last, and a million intricate warrens of corridors and passages honeycombed the earth for miles beneath the ground. It was impossible for the shelks to ever thread the mazes of the innumerable labyrinths, and so man reached a position of comparative safety.

"And thus came the deadlock.

"The Surface had become the property of the savage shelks, while far below them in the pits and corridors, man labored to hold on to the dregs of civilization that were left him. An unequal game it was, for man was sadly handicapped — the supplies of elements that produced the disintegrating rays gradually diminished, and there was no way of renewing them; they were unable to secure wood, or the thousand and one varieties of vegetation on which their industries were based; the men of one set of corridors had no way of of communicating with the men of another; and always came hordes of shelks, down into the corridors, hunting men for sport!

"The only thing that enabled them to live at all was the wonderful ability to create synthetic foods out of the very rock itself.

"So it was that man's civilization, fought for and won after centuries of struggle, collapsed in a dozen years; and over it was imposed the Terror. Men, like rabbits, lived a life of fear and trembling in their underground holes, daring less each year, as time went by, and spending all their time and energy in devising means to sink their pits deeper and deeper into the ground. Today it seems that man's subjugation is complete. For over a hundred years, no man has dared to think of revolt against the shelks, any more than a rat would think of revolt against man. Unable to form a unified government, unable even to communicate with his brethren in the neighboring corridors, man has come to accept far too willingly, his place as merely the highest of the lower animals. The spider-like Beasts of Venus are the supreme Masters of our planet, and — "

The manuscript had come to an end. Tumithak ceased as he read the concluding, unfinished sentence. For several moments there was silence and then —

"How hard it was to understand," said Thupra. "I only know that men were fighting with shelks, just as though they were Yakrans."

"Who could have conceived such a story?" murmured Nikadur, "Men fighting with shelks: of all the impossible tales!"

Tumithak did not answer. For quite a while he sat in silence and stared at the book as one who suddenly beheld some dazzling vision.

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At last he spoke.

"Nikadur, that is history!" he exclaimed. "That is no strange impossible tale of fancy. Something tells me that those men really lived; that that war was really fought. How else can we explain the life that we live. Have we not wondered often — have not our fathers wondered before us — how our wise ancestors ever gained the wisdom to build the great pits and corridors? We know that our ancestors had great knowledge; how did they come to lose it?

"Oh, I know that no legend of ours even suggests such a thing as men ruling this world," he went on, as he saw the incredulous look in the eyes of his companions. "But there is something — something in that book that tells me it is surely true. Just think, Nikadur! That book was written only a hundred and sixty years after the savage shelks invaded the earth! How much more that writer must have known than we who live two thousand years later. Nikadur, once men fought with shelks!" He arose, his eyes gleaming with the first glow of the fanatical light that, in later years, was to make him a man apart from his fellows, "*Once men fought with shelks:* and with the help of the High One, they shall do so again! Nikadur! Thupra! Some day *I* shall fight a shelk," he flung his arms wide, "some day I shall *slay* a shelk!

"And to that I dedicate my life!"

"He stood briefly with his arms outstretched, and then, as if oblivious of their presence, he dashed down the hallway and was lost in the gloom. For a moment, the two stared after him in amazement, and then, clasping hands, they walked slowly, soberly after him. They knew that something had suddenly inspired their friend, but whether it was genius or madness they could not tell. And they were not to know with certainty for many years.

TUMLOOK CONTEMPLATED his son proudly. The years that had passed since he had discovered the strange manuscript and acquired his strange obsession may have ruined his mind, as some said, but they had certainly been kind to him, physically. Six feet tall Tumithak stood (an exceptional height for these dwellers in the corridors), and every inch seemed to be of iron muscle. Today, on his twentieth birthday, there was not a man that would not have hailed him as one of the leaders of the city, had it not been for his preposterous mania. For Tumithak was resolved to kill a shelk!

For years — in fact, since he had found the manuscript, at the age of fourteen — he had directed all his studies to this end. He had pored over maps of the corridors; ancient maps that had not been used for centuries — maps that showed the way to the Surface — and he was

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known to be an authority on all the secret passages in the pit. He had little idea of what the Surface was really like; there was little in the stories of his people to tell him of it. But of one thing he was certain; that on the Surface he would find the shelks.

He had studied the various weapons that man could still rely on — the sling, the sword, and the bow; and had made himself proficient in the use of all three. Indeed, in every way possible, he had prepared himself for the great work to which he had decided to devote his life. Of course, he had met with the opposition of his father, of the whole tribe, for that matter, but with the singleness of purpose that only a fanatic can attain, he persisted in his idea, resolved that when he was of age he would bid his people adieu, and set out for the Surface. He had given little thought to the details of what he would do when he arrived there. That would all depend on what he found. One thing he was sure of — that he would kill a shelk and bring its body back to show his people that men could still triumph over those who thought they were man's masters.

And today he became of age; today he was twenty, and Tumlook could not resist being secretly proud of this astounding son of his, even though he had done everything in his power to turn him from the impossible dream that he had conceived. Now that the day had come when Tumithak was to start on his absurd quest, Tumlook had to admit that in his heart, he had long been one with Tumithak, and that now he was eager to see the boy started on his way. He spoke:

"Tumithak," he said. "For years, I have sought to turn you from the impossible task that you have set yourself. For years, you have opposed me and persisted in believing in the actual possibility of achieving your dream. And now the day has come when you are to actually set out to achieve it. Do not think that it was anything other than a father's love that led me to oppose your ambition, and to try and keep you in Loor. But now that the day has come when you are free to do as you please, and as you are still determined to make your incredible attempt, you must at least allow your father to help you all he can."

He paused and lifted to the table a box about a foot square. He opened it and drew from it three strange-looking objects.

"Here," he said, impressively, "are three of the most precious treasures of the food-men; implements devised by our wise ancestors of old. This one," and he picked up a cylindrical tube about an inch in diameter and a foot long, "is a torch, a wonderful torch that will give you light in the dark corridors by merely pressing this button. Take care not to waste its power; it is not made of the eternal light that our ancestors

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set in the ceilings. It is based on a different principle and after a certain time, its power is exhausted."

Tumlook picked up the next object gingerly.

"This, too, is something that will surely help you, though it is neither so rare nor so wonderful as the other two. It is a charge of high explosive, such as we use occasionally for closing a corridor, or in mining the elements from which our food is made. There is no telling when it may come in handy, on your way to the Surface.

"And here," he picked up the last article, which looked like a small pipe with a handle set on one end, at right angles, "here is the most wonderful article of all. It shoots a small pellet of lead, and it shoots it with such force that it will pierce even a sheet of metal! Each time this small trigger on the side is pressed, a pellet is ejected from the mouth of the pipe, with terrific force. It kills, Tumithak, kills even quicker than an arrow, and much surer. Use it carefully for there are but ten pellets, and when they are gone, the instrument is useless."

He laid the three articles on the table before him, and pushed them across to Tumithak. The younger man took them and stowed them carefully in the pockets of his wide belt.

"Father," he said, slowly, "You know it is not anything in my heart that commands me to leave you and go on this quest. There is something, higher than either of you or I, that has spoken to me and that I must obey. Since mother's death, you have been both mother and father to me, and so I probably love you more than the average man loves his father. But I have had a Vision! I dream of a time when Man will once again rule on the Surface and not a shelk will exist to oppose him. But that time can never come as long as men believe the shelks to be invincible, and so I am going to prove that they can really be slain — and by men!"

He paused and before he could continue, the door opened and Nikadur and Thupra entered. The former was a man now, the responsibility of a householder having fallen upon him at his father's death, two years before. And the latter had grown into a beautiful woman, a woman that Nikadur was soon to marry. They both greeted Tumithak with deference and when Thupra spoke, it was in an awed voice, as one who addressed a demi-god; and Nikadur, too, had obviously come to look upon Tumithak as something more than mortal. These two, with the possible exception of Tumlook, were the only ones that he would call his friends.

"Do you leave us today, Tumithak?" asked Thupra.

"Tumithak nodded. "Yes," he answered, "this very day. I start for the Surface. Before a month has gone by, I will lie dead in some distant

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corridor, or you shall look on the head of a shelk!"

Thupra shuddered. Either of these alternatives seemed terrible enough to her. But Nikadur was thinking of the more immediate dangers of the journey.

"You will have no trouble on the road to Nonone," he said, thoughtfully, "but mustn't you pass through the town of Yakra on the way to the Surface?"

"Yes," answered Tumithak. "There is no road to the Surface, except through Yakra. And beyond Yakra are the Dark Corridors, where men have not ventured for hundreds of years."

Nikadur considered. The city of Yakra had for over a century been the enemy of the people of Loor. Situated as it was, more than twenty miles nearer the Surface than Loor, it was inevitable that it should be much more conscious of the Terror. And it was just as inevitable that the people of Yakra should envy the Loorians their comparative safety, and continually make attempts to seize the city for their own. The small town of Nonone, located between the two larger cities, found itself sometimes fighting with the Yakrans, sometimes against them, as suited the convenience of the chiefs of the more powerful cities. At present, and indeed for the past twenty years, it was allied with Loor, and so Tumithak expected no trouble on his journey until he attempted to pass through Yakra.

"And the Dark Corridors?" questioned Nikadur.

"Beyond Yakra, there are no lights," replied Tumithak. "Men have avoided these passages for centuries. They are entirely too near the Surface for safety. Yakrans have at times attempted to explore them, but the parties that went out never returned. At least, so the men of Nonone have told me."

Thupra was about to make some remark, but Tumithak turned and busied himself with the pack of foodstuff that he intended to take with him on his journey. He slung it over his back and turned toward the door.

"The time has come for me to begin my journey," he said impressively. "This is the moment that I have awaited for years. Farewell, father! Farewell, Thupra! Nikadur, take good care of my little friend, and — if I do not return, name your first-born after me."

With a dramatic gesture that was characteristic of him, he thrust the door curtain aside and strode out into the corridor. The three followed him, calling and waving as he walked on up the hallway, but without so much as a backward glance, he strode along until he disappeared in the distant gloom.

They stood then, for a while, and then, with a dry sob, Tumlook turned and re-entered the apartment.

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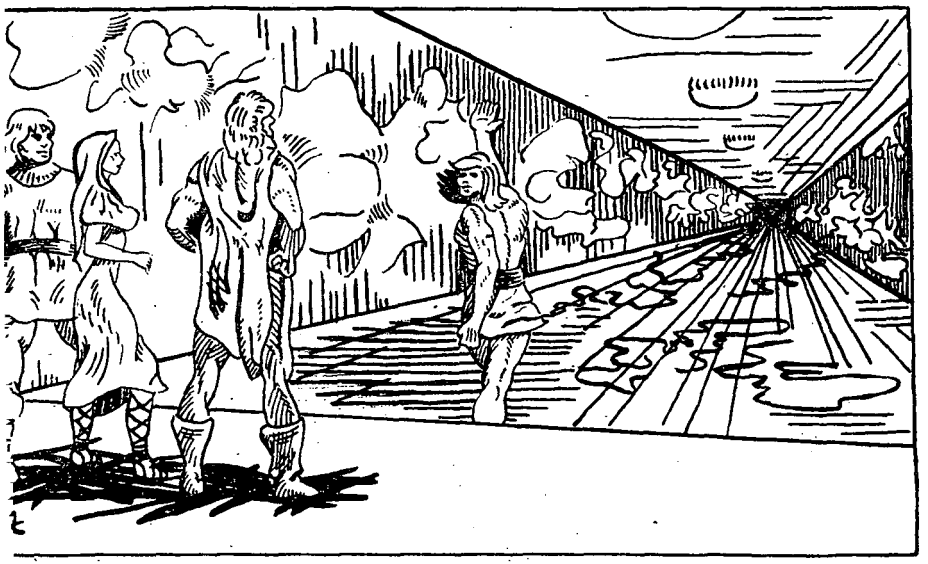

"He'll never return," he muttered to Nikadur. "He'll never return, of course."

Nikadur and Thupra answered nothing, only standing in uncomfortable silence. There was nothing consoling that they might say. Tumlook was right and it would have been foolish to attempt words of condolence that would have obviously been false.

The road that led from Loor to Nonone inclined very gradually upward. It was not an entirely strange road to Tumithak, for long ago he had been to that small town with his father, but the memory of the road was faint and now he found much to interest him as he left the lights of the populous portion of the town behind him. The entrances of other corridors continually appeared, corridors that were constructed to add to the labyrinthine maze, and that made it impossible for the creatures from the upper Surface to find their way into the great pits. The way did not lead along the broad main corridor for long. Often Tumithak would take his own way down what appeared to be quite an insignificant hallway, only to have it suddenly branch into another larger one, farther on.

It must not be supposed that Tumithak had so quickly forgotten his home in his anxiety to be on his quest. Often, as he passed some familiar sight, a lump would come into his throat and he would almost be tempted to give up his journey and return. Twice, Tumithak passed

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food-rooms, rooms where the familiar mystic machines throbbed eternally, building up out of the very rocks their own fuel and the tasteless biscuits of food that these people lived on. It was then that his homesickness was the greatest, for many times he had watched his father operating such machines as these, and the memory made him realize poignantly all that he was leaving behind. But like all of the inspired geniuses of humanity, it almost seemed as if something outside of himself took charge and forced him on.

Tumithak turned from the last large corridor to a single winding hall not more than a half-dozen feet in width. There were no doorways along this hall and it was much steeper than any he had yet climbed. It ran on for several miles and then entered a larger passage through a door that was seemingly but one of a hundred similar ones that lined this new passage. These doors were apparently those of apartments, but the apartments seemed to be unused for their were no signs of inhabitants in this district. Probably this corridor had been abandoned for some reason many years ago.

There was nothing strange in this to Tumithak, however. He knew quite well that these doorways were only to add extra confusion to the ones who sought to thread the maze of corridors, and he continued on his way, without paying the slightest attention to the many branching hallways, until he came to the room he sought.

It was an ordinary apartment, to all appearances, but when Tumithak found himself inside, he hastened to the rear and began to feel carefully over the walls. In a corner, he found what he was searching for — a ladder of metal bars, leading upwards. Confidently, he began the ascent, mounting steadily upward in the dark; and as minute followed minute, the faint glow of light that shone in from the corridor below grew smaller and smaller.

At last he reached the top of the ladder, and found himself standing at the mouth of the pit, in a room similar to the one he had left below. He strode out of the room into another of the familiar, door-lined corridors and turning in the direction that led upward, continued his journey. He was on the level of Nonone now, and if he hurried, he knew that he might reach that town before the time of sleep.

He hastened along, and presently he perceived a party of men in the distance who gradually approached him. He drew into an apartment from which he peered out cautiously, until he assured himself that they were Nononese. The red color of their tunics, their narrow belts and the peculiar way they had of dressing their hair, convinced him that these were friends, and so Tumithak showed himself and waited for the party to approach him. When they saw him, the foremost man, who

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was evidently the leader, hailed him.

"Is not this Tumithak of Loor?" he asked, and as Tumithak replied in the affirmative, he continued, "I am Nennapuss, chief of the people of Nonone. Your father has acquainted us with the facts of your journey and asked us to be looking for you about this time. We trust that you will spend the next sleep with us; and if there is anything that we can do to add to your comfort or safety on your journey, you have but to command us."

Tumithak almost smiled at the rather pompous speech the chief had evidently prepared beforehand, but he answered gravely, that he would indeed be indebted if Nennapuss could provide him with sleeping quarters. The chief assured him that the best in the town would be provided, and, turning, led Tumithak off in the direction from which he and his party had come.

They traversed several miles of deserted passages before they finally came to the inhabited halls of Nonone, but once here, the hospitality of Nennapuss knew no bounds. The people of Nonone were assembled in the "Great Square," as the juncture of the two main corridors was called, and in a florid, flowing speech that was characteristic of him, Nennapuss told them of Tumithak and his quest; and presented him, as it were, with the keys of the city.

After an answering speech by Tumithak, in which the Loorian worked himself up into a fine fury of eloquence on his favorite subject — his journey — a banquet was prepared; and even though the food was only the tasteless biscuits that constituted the sole diet of these people, they gorged themselves to repletion. When Tumithak at last fell asleep, it was with the feeling that here, at least, a tentative slayer of shelks might find appreciation. Had not the proverb been buried in centuries of ignorance and forgetfulness, he might have mused that a prophet is, verily, not without honor save in his own country.

Tumithak arose about ten hours later and prepared to bid good-by to the people of Nonone. Nennapuss insisted that the Loorian have breakfast with his family, and Tumithak willingly complied. The sons of Nennapuss, two lads in their early teens, were enthusiastic during the meal, over the wonderful idea that Tumithak had conceived. Though the idea of any other man facing a shelk was incredible to them, they seemed to think that Tumithak was something more than the average mortal, and plied him with a hundred questions as to his plans. But, beyond having studied the long route to the Surface, Tumithak's plans were decidedly vague, and he was unable to tell them how he would slay his shelk.

After the meal, he again shouldered his pack and started up the

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corridor. The chief and his retinue followed him for several miles, and as they went Tumithak questioned Nennapuss closely as to the condition of the passages to Yakra and beyond.

"The road on this level is quite safe," said Nennapuss, in answer to his questions. "It is patrolled by men of my city, and no Yakran ever enters it without our being aware of it. But the pit that leads to the level of Yakra is always guarded at the top by the Yakrans, and I do not doubt but that you will have trouble when you try to get out of that pit."

Tumithak promised to use an extra amount of caution when he reached this spot, and a short time later, Nennapuss and his companions said good-by to him and he trudged on alone.

He moved more warily, now, for though the Nononese patrolled these corridors, he knew quite well that it was possible for enemies to evade the guards and raid the corridors as had often been done in the past. He kept well in the middle of the corridor, away from the many doorways, any one of which may have concealed a secret road to Yakra, and he seldom passed one of the branching ways without peering carefully up and down it, before venturing to cross it.

But Tumithak was fortunate in meeting no one in the corridors, and after half a day he came at last to another apartment in which was located a shaft almost exactly similar to the one that had brought him to Nonone.

He mounted this ladder much more stealthily than he had the first one, for he was quite confident that a Yakran guard was at the top and he had no desire to be toppled backward into the pit when he reached there. As he drew near the end of the ladder, he drew his sword, but again luck favored him, for the guard had apparently left the room at the top of the well, and Tumithak drew himself up into the room and prepared to enter the corridor.

But he had moved only a scant half dozen feet when his luck deserted him. He bumped violently into a table that he had failed to notice in the gloom, and the resulting noise brought a bull-like bellow from the corridor without. The next moment, sword in hand, a veritable giant of a man dashed through the door and made for Tumithak.

THAT THE man was a Yakran, Tumithak would have known, had he met him in the depths of Loor. Though the Loorian knew of the Yakrans only through the stories of the older men, who remembered the wars with that city, he saw at once that this was just the kind of barbarian that had figured in the stories. He was fully four inches taller than Tumithak, and far broader and heavier, and his chin was covered with a tremendous, bristly growth of beard — sufficient evidence that the owner was of Yakra. His tunic was covered with bits of bone and

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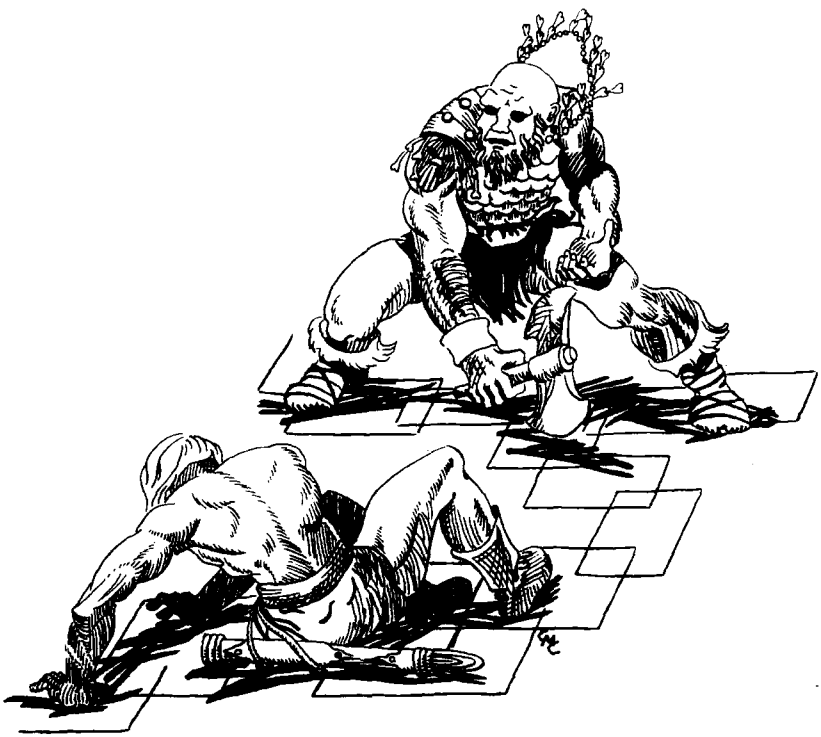
metal sewn into the cloth, the former stained in various colors and sewn in a crude pattern. Around his neck was a necklace made of dozens of fingerbones threaded on a thin strip of skin.

Tumithak saw in an instant that he would have little chance with this huge Yakran if he were to stand fairly up to him, and so, even as he drew his sword and prepared to defend himself, he was casting about in his mind for some method to overcome him by strategy. The most probable plan, he decided at once, would be to drive him somehow into the pit; but to drive this colossus was almost as impossible as to defeat him by face-to-face fighting methods. But before Tumithak could devise any more subtle method of overcoming his adversary, he found his entire mind taken up with methods of defending himself.

The Yakran rushed at him, still shouting his rumbling war-cry, and it was but the merest lurch that enabled Tumithak to avoid the first terrific blow aimed at him. Tumithak dropped to one knee, but in a moment was up again and only just in time to avoid another sweep of that lightning sword. On his feet again, however, his defense was perfect, and the Yakran found it necessary to retire a step or two, in order to prepare another of his lunging rushes.



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Again and again the Yakran rushed at Tumithak, and it was only the Loorian's uncanny skill at fencing, learned through many years in the hope of facing a shelk, that saved him. Around and around the table, now close to the pit and now farther away, they fought, until even Tumithak's steel-like muscles began to tire.

But as his body tired, his brain quickened, and at last a plan came to him to defeat the Yakran. He allowed himself to be gradually forced to the edge of the pit and then, as he parried a particularly powerful lunge, he suddenly threw one hand high in the air and screamed. The Yakran, believing that he had struck him, smiled a vicious smile and stepped back for a final rush. Sword pointing at Tumithak's breast, he dashed forward, and as he did so, Tumithak threw himself at his opponent's feet.

There was a wild howl from the giant as he stumbled over the recumbent form, but before he could recover himself, he dropped heavily at the very edge of the pit. Tumithak kicked wildly, and the great Yakran, grasping frantically at the air, dropped into the well! There was a hoarse cry from the darkness below, a heavy thud and then silence.

For several minutes, Tumithak lay panting at the edge of the pit. This was the first battle he had ever had with a man, and though he was the victor, it was only by a miracle, it seemed, that he had not been defeated. What would the people of Loor and Nonone say, he wondered, if they knew that their self-appointed slayer of shelks had been so nearly defeated by the first enemy that had attacked him — and that enemy not a shelk, but a man, and a man of despised Yakra, at that? For several minutes, the Loorian lay, filled with self-reproach, and then reflecting that if all his enemies were conquered with a margin even so small as this, his victory was certain, he arose, pulled himself together and left the room.

He was in Yakra now, and it was necessary for him to find some means of passing safely through the city in order to reach the dark corridors beyond. For only through these dark corridors might he win his way to the upper Surface. He continued cautiously on his way, turning over in his brain plan after plan that would enable him to deceive the Yakrans; but he was almost within sight of the inhabited walls of Yakra before he conceived an idea that seemed to him to be feasible. There was but one thing that all men in these pits feared, and with a fear that was quite unreasoning. It was upon this unreasoning fear that Tumithak decided to play.

He began to run. He ran slowly at first, a mere trot, but as he drew nearer the corridors where men lived, he increased his pace, running faster and faster until he was fleeing along like one who had all the

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demons of hell at his back. Which was precisely the effect that he wished to produce.

In the distance he saw a group of Yakrans approaching. They beheld him at the same time that he spied them, and in a moment more were charging down on him, quite aware, as he knew, that he was not a Yakran. Instead of trying to avoid them, he charged straight into their midst, screaming at the top of his lungs.

"Shelks!" he shouted, as though in the last stages of terror, "Shelks!"

The bellicose attitude of the men changed at once to one of extreme fright. Without a word to Thumithak or even so much as a backward glance, they turned, and as he dashed past them, they sped panic-stricken after him. Had they been men of Loor, they might have paused long enough to investigate, or at least, have held Tumithak and questioned him. But not these Yakrans. This town was many miles nearer the Surface than Loor, and many of the older men could still remember the last time that the shelks had raided these halls on one of their rare hunting expeditions, leaving a trail of death and destruction that would never be forgotten while those that witnessed it lived. So the terror was far more of a living thing to Yakra than it was to Loor, to whom it was little more than a terrible legend of the past.

And so, without a word of question, the Yakrans fled down the long corridor after Tumithak, through branching hallways and through doorways that seemed mere entrances to apartments, but were actually roads to the main corridor. Several times they passed other men or groups of men, but at the fearful cry of "Shelks" these always dropped whatever they were doing and followed the frightened throng. A good many dashed down branching corridors, in which, they imagined, lay greater safety; but the majority continued on their way to the heart of the city, the direction in which Tumithak was going.

The Loorian was no longer in the lead now, several of the fleeter Yakrans had passed him, terror lending wings to their feet. And so the size of the mob grew, and was augmented by greater and greater numbers as they came closer to the town center, until at last the corridor was filled with a screaming, terrified multitude in which Tumithak was completely lost.

They neared the wide, main corridor, and here they found a great mass of people that had surged in from every one of the branching corridors. How the news had traveled so quickly, Tumithak was unable to guess, but apparently the entire city was already aware of the supposed danger. And like sheep, or rather, like the humans they were, all had been seized with the same idea — the desire to reach the center of the city, where they supposed the greatest safety lay in the presence of the greatest numbers.

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But now this frenzied confusion bade fair to defeat the plan that Tumithak had devised to cross the city safely. To be sure, he had almost run to the center of the city without discovery, and the inhabitants were so wrought up that there would be little chance of anyone noticing that he was a stranger; but so thickly packed was the crowd that it became more and more certain that the Loorian was not going to be able to work his way through, in order to reach the corridors beyond. Yet in spite of the apparent hopelessness, Tumithak struggled along with the frantic mob, hoping against hope that he might gain a comparatively clear corridor beyond the city's center before the fright of the people died down to the point where they would begin the inevitable search for the one who had started the panic.

The crowd, its fright enhanced by that strange sense of telepathy that is evident in any large assembly of people, was becoming dangerous. Men were using their fists freely to better their way; they passed their weaker brothers, and here and there voices could be heard, high pitched with anger. Tumithak saw a man stumble and fall, and a moment later, heard a scream as the unfortunate one was trampled on by the ones behind him. Hardly had the scream died away when there was another cry from the opposite side of the passage, where another man had fallen and found himself unable to regain his feet.

The Loorian seemed little more than a leaf borne along on the stream of shouting, gesticulating, Yakrans by the time he reached the center of the city. Time after time, he had almost been swept from his feet, only to regain his balance by what seemed a miracle. He had nearly gained the huge square that marked the crossing of the two main corridors when he stumbled over a fallen Yakran and almost went down. He attempted to pass on, and then stopped. The form beneath his feet was that of a woman with a baby in her arms!

Her face was tear-strained and bleeding, her clothes were torn in a dozen places, yet she was attempting bravely to prevent the injury of her child beneath the feet of the multitude. Tumithak instantly stooped over to raise her to her feet, but even before he could do so, the crowd had pushed him almost beyond the reach of her. Sudden anger swept over him, and plunging out wrathfully, he dealt blow after blow into the faces of the onrushing multitude of creatures, who would have crushed one of their own people in their anxiety for personal safety. The Yakrans yielded before his blows, poured on either side of him for a moment, and in that moment, Tumithak stopped and raised the woman to her feet.

She was still conscious, as the wan smile that she bestowed upon him showed, and though he knew she was an enemy of his people,

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Tumithak felt a momentary pity that his ruse to frighten the Yakrans had been so successful. She was trying to tell him something, but so great were the confused shouts that it was impossible for him to understand her. He bent down his head to hers to hear what she had to say.

"The doorway across the hall," she screamed in his ear, "Try to get through the crowd to the third doorway across the hall! There is safety there!"

Tumithak placed her in front of him and drove savagely into the crowd, his fists flashing out around her and protecting her as they moved. It was hard to keep from being hustled, against his will, into the central square, but at last he gained the doorway and thrust the woman through it. He followed her inside, and gave a great gasp of relief as he found himself free from the struggles of the crowd. He stood for a moment in the doorway, to assure himself that nobody intended to follow them, and then turned back to the woman with the child.

She had torn a small piece of cloth from the sleeve of her tattered garment and as he faced her, she paused from wiping the blood and tears from her face long enough to flash him a frightened, little smile. Tumithak could not but wonder at the apparent gentleness and refinement of this woman of savage Yakra. He had been taught to believe, since childhood, that the Yakrans were a strange race, not unlike our concept of goblins and witches, and yet, this woman might have been a daughter of one of the best families of Loor. Tumithak had to learn that in no matter what nation or age one finds oneself, he will find gentleness, if he looks, as well as savagery.

All this while the child, who had evidently been too frightened to cry, had been as silent as though dead, but now it set up a lusty screaming. The mother, after attempting for several moments to silence it with croonings and whispers, at last applied nature's first silencer, and as the child quieted down and began nursing, she arose and motioning Tumithak to follow, led the way to the doorway across the room and entered the rear of the apartment. She was gone a moment, and then she called to the Loorian, and with a realization of what she meant dawning in his mind, he followed her. In the next room, sure enough, the woman pointed to the ceiling and showed him the circular hole of a shaft leading straight upward.

"Here is the entrance to an old corridor that is not known to more than twenty people in all Yakra," she said, "It leads across the square to the upper end of the city. We can hide up there for days and the shelks will probably never know that we exist. Here is safety."

Tumithak nodded and began the ascent of the ladder, pausing only long enough to assure himself that the woman was following him. The

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ladder extended not more than thirty feet upward and then they found themselves in the dark, in a corridor that must have been unused for many centuries. So dark was it that as soon as they moved away from the pit shaft, it was impossible to distinguish the faintest glow of light. Certainly the woman was right in calling this an unknown corridor. Even Tumithak's maps had never told him of this passage.

The woman seemed to be quite at home in the passage, however, for with a whispered word to Tumithak, she began to feel her way along the wall, only stopping now and then to whisper softly to her baby. Tumithak followed her, keeping one hand on her shoulder and so they felt their way along until they came at last to a spot where a single light glowed dimly, and here the woman sat down to rest. Tumithak did likewise, and the woman, reaching into her pocket, drew out a crude needle and thread and began to stitch the tears in her garment. Presently, she spoke:

"Isn't it terrible," she whispered, her voice hushed as though she feared that even here the shelks might be listening. "What has started them to hunting again, I wonder?"

Tumithak made no reply and in a moment, she continued:

"My grandfather was killed in a shelk raid. That must have been nearly forty years ago. And now they have come upon us again! My poor husband! I was separated from him almost as soon as we left our apartment. Oh! I do hope he reaches safety. He doesn't know about this corridor." She looked to him for comfort. "Do you think he will be safe?"

Tumithak smiled.

"Will you believe me if I tell you that he is surely safe from the shelks?" he asked. "Truly, I can assure you that he will not be slain by the shelks in this raid."

"I only hope you are right," the woman began, and then, as if she had noticed him for the first time, she exclaimed, suddenly. "You are not of Yakra!"

And then quite positively and harshly, "You are a man of Loor!"

Tumithak realized that the woman had at last noticed the Loorian clothes that he wore, and so made no attempt to lie.

"Yes," he answered, "I am of Loor."

The woman arose in consternation, clasping her baby tighter to her breast, as though to protect it from this ogre from the lower corridors.

"What are you doing in these halls?" she asked, fearfully, "Is it you that have brought this raid down upon us? I could well believe that the men of Loor would ally themselves with the shelks, if such a thing were possible. And surely, this is the first time in history that the shelks ever came upon us from the lower end of the city."

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Tumithak considered for a moment. He saw no reason why he should not tell this woman the truth. It could do her no harm, and might at least put her mind at rest, regarding the safety of her husband.

"It will probably be the last time that the shelks ever come upon you from the lower end of the city, too," he said, and in a few brief words, he explained to her this ruse and its rather appalling success.

"But why should you desire to pass through Yakra?" she asked, incredulously. "Are you going into the dark corridors? What man in his senses would desire to explore them?"

"I am not seeking to explore the dark corridors," the Loorian answered, "My goal lies even beyond them!"

"Beyond the dark corridors?"

"Yes," said Tumithak, and rose to his feet. As always when he spoke of his "mission," he was, for the moment a dreamer, a fanatic.

"I am Tumithak," he said. "I am the slayer of the shelk. You wish to know why I seek to go beyond the dark corridors? It is because I am on my way to the Surface. For on the Surface is a shelk that, all unknowing, awaits his doom! I am going to slay a shelk!"

The woman gazed at him in consternation. She was quite certain, now, that she was alone with a madman. No other could even conceive such an incredible thought. She clasped her child tighter to her and drew away from him.

Tumithak was quick to notice her attitude. He had, many times before seen people draw away from him in just the same manner, when he spoke of his mission. And so, quite unoffended by her unflattering opinion of him, he began to explain to her why he believed it possible for men to once more engage in battle with the masters of the Surface.

The woman listened for a while, and as he waxed more and more eloquent on his subject, Tumithak saw that she was beginning to believe. He told her of the book he had found, and how it had decided for him what his mission in life should be. He told her of the three strange gifts of his father, and how he hoped they would help him to be successful in his quest. And at last, he saw the look come into her eyes that he had often seen in Thupra's and knew that she believed.

The woman's thoughts, however, had been quite different from what Tumithak believed. She had listened, to be sure, but as she listened, she was thinking of the fury with which Tumithak had attacked the terror stricken mob that had nearly crushed her. She was studying the erect, handsome form of him, the smooth-shaven face and keen eyes; and comparing him with the men of Yakra. And at last she believed, not because of Tumithak's eloquence, but because of the age-old appeal of sex.

"It is well that you saved me," she said at last, when the Loorian

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paused in his story. "It would have hardly been possible for you to force your way through the lower corridors. Up here, you may cross Yakra at your leisure, and leave it whenever you will. I will show you the way to the upper end of the city, now, if you wish."

She arose.

"Come, I will guide you. You are a Loorian and an enemy, but you saved my life, and one who would slay a shelk is surely the true friend of all mankind."

She took him by the hand (though that was hardly necessary), and led him on into the darkness. Minute after minute passed in silence and then, at last, she paused and whispered, "The corridor ends here."

She stepped into the doorway, and following her, Tumithak discerned a faint light coming up through a shaft from the corridor below.

He dropped down the ladder that he could see dimly in the gloom, and in a moment was in the lower corridor. The woman followed him, and when she reached the ground she pointed up the corridor.

"If you are really going to the Surface, your road lies that way," she said, "and we must part here. My road lies back into the town. I wish I might know you better, O Loorian," she paused and then as she strode off, she turned to exclaim, "Go on to the Surface, strange one, and if you succeed in your quest, do not fear to pass through Yakra on your return. All the city would worship you then, and do you reverence."

As if afraid to say more, she hurried down the passage. Tumithak watched her for a moment and then, with a shrug, turned and walked away in the opposite direction.

He had expected to reach the dark corridors soon after leaving Yakra; but although his maps told him much concerning the route he must take, they were silent concerning the conditions of the various corridors; and it soon became evident to Tumithak that he was not to reach the dark corridors that day. Fatigue overcame him at last, and entering one of the many deserted apartments that lined the passage, he threw himself upon the floor and in a moment was sound asleep.

HOURS AFTER, the Loorian awakened with a start. He looked about him vaguely for a moment, and then started into full wakefulness. In the corridor without, he had heard a soft rustling. Scarcely breathing, he arose and, tiptoeing to the doorway, peered cautiously out. The corridor was empty, yet Tumithak was certain that he had heard soft footsteps.

He stepped back into the room, picked up his pack, which he had removed before falling asleep, and adjusted it on his back. Then, once more carefully scanning the empty corridor, he stepped out and

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prepared to resume his journey.

Before going on, though, he drew his sword and looked thoroughly through all the neighboring apartments. It puzzled him to find them all deserted. He was quite sure that he had heard a noise; quite sure, if fact that someone was watching him. But at last, he was forced to admit that unless he was mistaken in their existence, the watchers were more clever than he; and so, keeping well to the center of the corridor, he took up his journey again.

For hours, he kept up a continuous, monotonous pace. The route was steadily upward, the corridor was broad, and to Tumithak's surprise the lights continued undimmed. He had almost forgotten the cause of his sudden awakening, when, after traveling some eight or nine miles, he was suddenly aware of another soft, rustling sound, quite similar to the former one. It came from one of the apartments on his left, and he had scarcely heard it, when he sprang like lightning to the door from which it came, his sword flashing from its sheath. He dashed into the apartment, through the front room and into the rear one, and then stood foolishly, looking around him at the bare brown walls. Like the apartment which he had examined in the morning, this one was quite empty. There were no ladders up which the mysterious one might have escaped, indeed, there seemed to be no way in which anyone might have escaped discovery and, at last, Tumithak was forced to continue on his way.

But he moved more warily, now. He was as cautious as he had been before entering Yakra; in fact, even more so, for then he had known what to expect.

As the hours passed, Tumithak becaming increasingly certain of the fact that he was being followed — was being watched. Time after time, he would hear the slight rustling noise, sometimes from the dark recesses of an apartment, sometimes from down the path of some dimly lighted branching corridor. Once, he was certain that he heard the sound far ahead of him in the hall that he was traversing. But never was he able to catch so much as a glimpse of the beings that caused the sound.

Finally, he came to a section of the corridors where the lights began to dim. At first only a few were affected, their light coming from the plates with a peculiar bluish flow, but before long the bluish tint was the rule rather than the exception, and many of the lights were out entirely. Tumithak traveled on in an increasing gloom, and realized that he was, at last, really approaching the legendary dark corridors.

Now, Tumithak was the product of a hundred generations of men who had fled from the slightest suspicious sound. For hundreds of years after the Invasion, an unusual sound had meant a man-hunting

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shelk, and a shelk had meant death, sudden, sure and unmistakable. So man had become a skulking, fleeing race of creatures that fled panic-stricken from the least suspicion of danger.

In deep-cut Loor, however, men had made a warren so intricate and lengthy that years had passed since a shelk had been seen. And so it came about that the men grew more courageous in Loor, until there arose, at last, a visionary who dared to dream of slaying a shelk.

But although Tumithak was bolder by far than any other man of his generation, it must not be supposed that he had overcome entirely, the heritage that was man's. Even now as he trudged so firmly up the apparently endless hallway, his heart was beating wildly, and it would have taken little to send him back on the way he had come, his heart almost smothering him in his fright.

But apparently those who followed him knew well not to agitate his fears too greatly. As the corridors grew darker, the noises lessened, and at last, Tumithak decided that he was quite alone. Whatever had been following him, he felt, had turned back or continued down one of the branching halls. For over an hour, he strained his ears in an attempt to hear again the soft noises, but only silence was his reward; so his vigilance gradually lessened and he trod more and more carelessly up the hall.

He passed from a corridor of eternal gloom to one of eternal darkness. Here the lights, if there had ever been any, had long since ceased to glow, and for some time Tumithak felt his way along the passage, depending only on his sense of touch.

And in the corridor below, a number of dark, gaunt figures moved from the floor to the darkness and hurried silently toward him.

As they went, they would have presented a strange appearance, could anyone have seen them. Gaunt almost to the point of emaciation, with strange, slate-colored skins, perhaps the most surprising thing about their apearance was their heads, which were wrapped with layer after layer of strips of cloth which completely covered their eyes, making it impossible for the slightest ray of light to reach them.

For these were the savages of the dark corridors — men born and raised in the halls of eternal night — and so sensitive were their eyes that the least light was an intolerable pain. All day long they had been shadowing Tumithak, and all day long their eyes had been veiled with the bandages, leaving the savages to move by their astounding senses of hearing and feeling alone. But now that they were again in the halls that were their home, they hastened to remove the cumbersome cloths. And when this was accomplished, they gradually closed in upon their intended victim.

The first intimation of their presence that Tumithak had after

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entering the darkness, was when he heard a sudden rush behind him. He turned quickly, drew his sword and lashed out savagely. His sword cut through the air, he heard a sardonic laugh and then silence. Furiously he lunged again, and again his sword met only empty air, and then he heard new rustling in the hall behind him.

He turned, realizing that they had surrounded him. Sword flashing furiously, he backed to the wall prepared to sell his life as dearly as possible. He felt his blade strike something that yielded, heard a cry of pain and then suddenly quiet descended on the corridor. The Loorian was not to be deceived, however; he kept up the vicious beating about him with his sword, and presently had the satisfaction of hearing another groan of pain as he struck one of the savages who had attempted to creep under his guard.

But, though Tumithak continued to defend himself to the best of his ability, and lashed about with the courage born of desperation, he had little doubt as to the outcome of the struggle. He was alone, with his back to the wall, while his enemies, already numbering he knew not how many, were constantly having their numbers increased by the arrival of others. Tumithak prepared to die fighting, his only regret was that he must die in this stygian darkness, unable even to see the opponents who conquered him — and then suddenly he remembered the torch, the first of his father's strange gifts.

With his left hand, he fumbled in his belt and drew out the cylinder. At least he would have the satisfaction of knowing what sort of creatures these were that had attacked him. In a moment he had found the switch and filled the hall with light.

He was totally unprepared for the effect that the brilliant beam of light had upon his enemies. Cries of pain and dismay burst from them, and Tumithak's first sight of the savages was that of a dozen or more scrawny, dark-colored figures that buried their heads in their arms and turned to flee in terror down the passage. Panic-stricken, bawling strange, harsh words to their companions, they fled from the light, as if Tumithak had suddenly been reinforced by all the men of Loor.

For a moment, Tumithak stood dazed. He was, of course, unable to account for the sudden flight of his attackers. The idea occurred to him that they fled from some danger that he was unable to see and he flashed his light about the corridor fearfully, but at last, as their cries diminished in the distance, the truth gradually dawned on him. These creatures were so much at home in the dark that it must really be, thought Tumithak, that they feared the light; and though he could not understand why this should be, he determined to keep the torch burning as long as his route remained in the dark.

So flashing its rays this way and that, up branching corridors and into

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open doorways, the Loorian continued on his way. He knew that any thought of sleeping in these dark halls was out of the question, but this bothered him little. Shut up in the pits and corridors for centuries, man had forgotten the regular hours that he had once kept, and although he usually slept eight or ten hours out of thirty, it was entirely possible for a man to go forty or fifty hours before he felt the necessity of sleep. Tumithak had often worked steadily, under his father, for as many hours as this, and so now he felt confident that he would be out of the dark corridors long before he gave way to fatigue.

He munched, now and then, on the biscuits of synthetic food that he had brought with him; but for the most part, his entire time was spent in carefully scanning the corridors before and behind him. And so the hours passed. He had almost reached the point where his fears were allayed sufficiently to allow him to enter one of the apartments and seek slumber, when he heard, far behind him in the corridor, a strange inhuman snarl. Fear seized him instantly. He felt a sudden crawling sensation at the back of his neck, and, darting instantly into the nearest doorway, he extinguished his torch and lay trembling in an excess of fear.

It must not be supposed that Tumithak had suddenly become a coward. Remember the courage with which he had faced the Yakran and the dark savages. But it was the inhumanity of the sound that terrified him. In the lower passages, with the exception of rats, bats and few other small creatures, no animals had ever been known; except the shelks. They alone had followed man into his pits, and so it was natural that to them alone could Tumithak attribute the sound that had certainly come from some large creature other than man. He was yet to learn that there were other animals from the Surface that had been driven into these upper corridors.

So now he cowered in the apartment, vainly attempting to lash his courage to the point where he could go out and face his enemy. Suppose it were a shelk, he argued. Had he now come all these dangerous miles for the sole purpose of facing a shelk? Was he not Tumithak, the hero whom the High One had called to deliver Man from the heritage of fear that was his? And so, with arguments such as this, his indomitable spirit lashed his body into a semblance of courage, until at last he arose and again entered the corridor.

As he might have known, it appeared empty. His flashlight lit up the passage fully five hundred feet away, but the corridor was apparently quite deserted. He continued on his way; but as he went, he now paid more attention to the lower corridor than he did to the corridor above. And so, presently, he noticed, at the very limit of the light, a number of strange, slinking figures that followed him at a safe distance. His sharp

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eyes told him that these creatures were neither sheiks nor men; but what they were, he was at a loss to guess. It was many generations since the men of the lower corridors had even heard of man's one-time friend, the dog.

He paused uncertainly, and watched these strange creatures. They slunk out of reach of the torch's rays at once, and after a moment Tumithak turned and continued his journey, half convinced that, in spite of their size, they were merely some large species of rat, as cowardly as their smaller brethren.

In this he was soon to find himself mistaken. He had continued for but a short distance, when he heard a snarl in the corridor ahead of him; and as though this were a singal, the beasts behind him began to draw steadily closer. Tumithak increased his pace, broke into a trot, and finally into a run; but fast as he went, the beasts behind him were faster, and gradually closed in on him.

It was when they were but a little less than a hundred feet behind him that he noticed their masters. The savages that he had vanquished a few hours before, had returned, their faces buried in the swathings that they had worn when they stalked him in the corridors beyond Yakra. And with whispered urgings, they drove the dogs on until Tumithak again found it necessary to draw forth his sword and prepare to defend himself.

The beasts from the upper end of the corridor had appeared by this time, and the Loorian soon found himself surrounded by a snarling, snapping pack of creatures against whose numbers it was utterly useless to attempt to defend himself. He slew one, another fell snapping at a great gash across its mangy back; but before he could do more, his light was knocked out of his hand and he felt a half dozen hairy forms leap upon him. He fell heavily to the ground with the dogs on top of him, his sword flying from his hand and disappearing in the darkness.

Tumithak expected to die then and there. He felt the hot breath of the monsters on various parts of his body, and that strange feeling of resignation came over him that almost every one feels in the presence of almost certain death, and then — the dogs were pulled away, and he felt hands on him and heard soft, muttering words as the savages felt over his body. He was pinioned to the ground by a half dozen wiry hands, and a moment later a band was tightened around him, fastening his arms firmly to his sides. He was picked up and carried away.

They carried him on up the corridor for some distance, turned after a while into one of the branching halls and continued for a long time before they at last halted and threw him upon the ground. Around him he heard many soft sounds, whispered conversation and the rustling of moving bodies, and he decided that he had been taken to the central

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halls of these creatures. After lying for some time, he was rolled over and a pair of thin hands felt him all over, and then a voice spoke firmly and with authority. Again he was picked up and carried for a short distance and then he was unceremoniously dumped down upon the floor of what he suspected was the floor of an apartment. Something metallic clanged on the floor beside him and he heard the departing footsteps of his captors in the corridor beyond the door.

For a while Tumithak lay still, gathering his thoughts. He wondered vaguely why he had not been killed, little dreaming that the savages knew well enough not to kill their meat until they were ready for the feast. For these savages had no knowledge of the preparation of the machine-made food, and lived by preying on Yakra and other smaller towns that existed far down the branching corridors. Reduced to such desperate straits, anything that would provide sustenance became their food and for many generations they had been cannibals.

After a while, Tumithak arose. He had little trouble in working loose the bonds of cloth that he was tied with; the knowledge of knots that the savages possessed was elementary, and so it took less than an hour for the Loorian to free himself. He began feeling carefully over the walls of the apartment, in an attempt to acquaint himself with the features of his prison. The room was little more than ten feet square, and the walls were broken by but a single door, the entrance. Tumithak attempted to pass through this door, but was halted immediately by a growl and a snarl, and a rough hairy body pushed against his legs, driving him back into the apartment. The savages had left the dogs to guard the entrance to his prison.

Tumithak stepped back into the room and as he did so, his foot struck an object that rolled across the floor. He remembered the metallic object that had been thrown into the apartment with him and wondered curiously what it was. Groping around, he finally located it, and to his joy realized that it was his flashlight. He was quite unable to understand why the savages had brought it here, but he decided that to their superstitious minds, it was something to fear, and that they thought it best to keep these two dangerous enemies imprisoned together. At any rate, here it was, and for that Tumithak was grateful.

He turned it on and looked around as its rays filled the apartment with light. Yes, he had been right about its size and simplicity. There was little chance, none at all, in fact, of his escaping unless he passed through the beast-guarded doorway. And in the light, Tumithak saw that the savages had left him but little chance to escape that way. The entire pack of over twenty stood just without the doorway, their eyes dazzled and blinking in the sudden light.

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From within the doorway, Tumithak could look far up the corridor, and he could see no one at all in all that stretch or hallway, as far as his light reached. He flashed it down the hallway; it, too, was empty. He decided that it was probably the time of sleep for these savages, and realized that if he was to escape, no better time would offer itself than the present. He sat down on the floor of the apartment and gave himself up to thought. Somewhere in the back of his mind an idea was glimmering, a faint conviction that he possessed the means to escape those animals. He arose and looked at the pack, huddled together in the corridor as if to protect themselves from the unwelcome rays of the torch. He turned to study the room, but apparently found little there to favor his half-formed plan. Suddenly, though, he reached a decision, and feeling in the pocket of his belt, he removed a round, pointed object, and pulling a pin from it, hurled it out among the pack and threw himself flat on his face!

It was the bomb, the second of his father's strange gifts. It struck the floor of the corridor without, and burst with a roar that was nothing short of deafening. In the confined space of the passage, the expanding gases acted with terrific force. Flat on the floor though he was, Tumithak was lifted and hurled violently against the opposite wall of the apartment. As for the beasts in the corridor without, they were practically annihilated. Torn bodies were flung in every direction, and when Tumithak, bruised and shaken, entered the corridor a few minutes later, he found it deserted of every living thing. But the scene resembled s shambles, with blood and torn bodies strewn all over the corridor.

Sick with the unaccustomed sight of blood and death, Tumithak hastened to put as much distance as possible between himself and the gruesome scene. He hurried on up the corridor, through the still smoke-laden air, until at last the air cleared and the horrors of the scene could be forgotten. He saw no signs of the savages, although twice he heard a whimpering from the doorway of some apartment and knew that a dark form probably cowered, terror-stricken, in the darkness. It would be many, many sleeps before the savages of the dark corridors forgot the enemy who had caused such destruction among them.

Tumithak emerged again into the corridor that led to the Surface. For the first time since he set out on that route, he retraced his steps, but it was with a definite object in view. He arrived at the place where he had battled with the dogs, and retrieved his sword, finding it without difficulty and noting with satisfaction that it was entirely unharmed. Then he once again took up his journey to the Surface, continuing for long without meeting with anything that could give him cause for alarm. At last he decided that he was past the dangerous parts of these halls,

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and entering one of the apartments he prepared himself for a long-needed rest . . .

He slept long and dreamlessly, awaking at last after more than fourteen hours of sleep. He immediately took up his journey again, partaking of his food as he went and wondering what this new march would mean for him.

But he was not to wonder for long. He was quite aware, from his maps, that he was now more than half through with his journey, and so he was not surprised when the walls of the corridors, which, ever since leaving Loor had continued as smooth and glossy as those of his own home, now began to assume a rough, irregular appearance, almost like that of a natural cavern. He was, he knew, approaching that section of the corridors which man had carved out in the days of his first panic-stricken flight into the earth. There had been little time, in those first days, to smooth down the walls of the corridors or to give them the regular rectangular appearance that they were to have in the lower corridors.

But though he was not surprised at this appearance of the passages, he was totally unprepared for their next change. He had travelled perhaps three or four miles through the winding, narrow caverns, when he came upon a well-concealed pit-mouth that led far up into the darkness. He could see that there was a light at the top and gave a sigh of gratitude, for his light had begun to show the first signs of failing. He climbed the ladder slowly, with his usual caution, and at last, emerging warily from the mouth of the shaft, he stepped into the strangest corridor he had ever beheld.

THE HALL in which Tumithak found himself was more brilliantly lighted than any he had ever seen. The lights were not all of the usual clear white; here and there, blues and greens vied with reds and golden yellows to add beauty to a scene that was already beautiful beyond anything that Tumithak had ever imagined. For a moment, he was at a loss to understand just where the luminescence was coming from, for there were no shining plates in the center of the ceiling, such as he had always been familiar with. But after a while, an explanation of the system of lighting dawned on him, and he saw that all the plates were cleverly concealed in the walls, so that the light reflected from them produced an effect of soft, creamy mellowness.

And the walls — the walls were no longer of the familiar glossy brown stone; they were of stone of the purest milky white! And though this in itself was a wonder that must have excited the Loorian's astonishment, it was not the color of the walls that held his attention riveted to them. It

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was the fact that the walls were covered with designs and pictures, intaglios and bas-reliefs, to such an extent that not a clear space was visible on walls or ceiling, at any place along the corridor. And even the floor bore an intricate design of varicolored inlaid stone.

Now, Tumithak had never dreamed of the possibility of such a thing as this. There was no art in the lower corridors, there never had been. That had been lost to man long before the first passage had been blasted down to Loor. And so Tumithak stood lost in wonder at the marvel that confronted him.

Although most of the wall was covered with design, there were many pictures, too. They showed in detail many wonderful things, things that Tumithak could scarcely believe existed. Yet here they were before him, and to his simple mind the fact that they were here in pictures were proof that somewhere they existed in reality.

Here, for instance, was a group of men and women dancing. They were in a circle and they danced around something in the center;

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something that could only partly be seen. But as he looked at it, Tumithak again felt the hair on the back of his neck begin to rise — the creature had long and spidery legs, and from somewhere in his subconscious mind a voice whispered, "Shelk."

Turning with a puzzled feeling of disgust from that picture, he came upon another one — it depicted a long corridor, and in it a cylindrical object that must have been eighteen or twenty feet long. It was mounted on wheels and around it were gathered a group of eager, waiting humans, with happy, excited looks on their faces. Tumithak puzzled over the pictures for many moments, unable to understand them. They didn't make sense. These people did not seem to fear the shelks! He came upon a picture that proved it. It showed again the long cylindrical object, and at its side were three beings that could be nothing but shelks. And grouped around them, talking and gesticulating, were another group of humans.

There was one thing that particularly impressed Tumithak in these pictures. The people were all fat. Everyone of them was florid and grossly overweight. But it was probably natural, thought the Loorian, of people who lived near the Surface and were apparently without any fear of the terrible shelk. Such a people would naturally have little to do but live and grow fat.

And so, musing and looking at the pictures, he continued along his way, until he saw in the distance, up the corridor a ponderous human form and realized that he was reaching the inhabited part of these corridors. The form disappeared down a branching corridor, almost as soon as he glimpsed it, but it was enough to make Tumithak realize that he must go much more carefully. So, for a long while, he slipped cautiously along the side of the passage, using every opportunity that was offered for concealment. He found a thousand things to excite his wonder; indeed, before long he found himself in a constant state of astonishment. Great tapestries were hung along the wall at one spot, at another, his heart leapt into his mouth as he came suddenly upon a group of statues. It was hard for him to realize that these carved stones were not really men.

There had been no doorways on the sides of the corridors at first; but now the corridor widened until it must have been fully forty feet broad, and apartment entrances began to appear. High and wide, these doorways were, and the "curtains" that covered them were of metal! It was Tumithak's first contact with true doors, for in Loor the cloth curtains were all that ever separated apartments from the corridor without.

Minute after minute passed, as Tumithak continued on his way. The pictures on the walls grew more elaborate, the corridor grew higher

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and even wider; and then, in the distance, Tumithak saw a number of human forms approaching him. He knew that he must not be seen, debated for a moment the advisability of turning about and retreating, and then he noticed an open door close to him. Before him was discovery and danger, behind him lay an unthinkable retreat. Tumithak had little choice in the matter; in a moment he had made his decision, had pushed the door wide open and stepped inside.

For a moment he stood, his eyes, used to the brilliant light without, failing him in the gloom of the apartment. Then he realized that he was not alone, for the room was occupied by a man who, to all appearances, was so frightened at Tumithak's sudden appearance as to be quite speechless. Tumithak took advantage of the other's evident fright to observe him carefully and to look about the room for some means of escape or concealment.

The room was lighted much more dimly than the hall, the light coming from two plates concealed in the wall near the ceiling. The walls were of a uniform dull blue and in the rear a tapestried door led to the back room. A table, a huge, padded chair, a bed, and a shelf that was filled with books, made up the furniture of the room. And in the midst of the bed lay this huge man.

The man was a veritable mountain of flesh. Tumithak estimated that he certainly must have weighed four hundred pounds. He was well over six feet tall, and the bed on which he lay, which would easily have held three of Tumithak's fellow citizens, was completely filled with his bulk. He was a florid, full-blooded type of man; and his pale blond hair and beard only served to accentuate the redness of his face and neck.

But the coarseness of the man's features was offset by the refinement of his surroundings. Never had such luxuries been dreamed of by the man of Loor. The clothes that the man wore were of the finest texture imaginable, sheer gauzes that were dyed in the most delicate shades of nacreous pinks, and greens, and blues. They flowed down over his form, softening and dignifying the immense obesity of him. The bed-clothes were as fine and sheer as the man's garments, but of a deep shade of green and brown. The bed itself was a revelation, a glorious triumph in inlaid metals that might have been wrought by some wonderful artisan of the Golden Age. And flung across the floor was a rug — And the pictures on the wall! —

The man suddenly regained control of himself. He set up a scream, a high-pitched womanly scream that seemed strangely absurd coming from one of his bulk. Tumithak was at his side in an instant, with his sword at the fat one's throat.

"Stop that!" he ordered peremptorily. "Stop it at once, or I'll kill you!"

The other subsided, his screams at once becoming a series of

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involuntary agonized groans. Tumithak stood listening, fearful that the first scream might have been effective, but the silence from without was unbroken. After fully a minute, the man spoke.

"You are a wild man," he said, and his voice was full of terror. "You are a wild man of the lower corridors! What are you doing here among the Chosen Ones?"

Tumithak ignored the question.

"Make another sound, fat one," he whispered, fiercely, "and there will be one less mouth to feed in these halls." He looked toward the door anxiously. "Is any one likely to enter here?" he asked.

The other attempted to answer, but apparently his fear had by now rendered him speechless. Tumithak laughed scornfully, a strange elation possessing him. It was indeed pleasant to the Loorian to find someone that feared him so terribly. Man had not felt this strange sense of power often in the preceding centuries and Tumithak was half tempted to increase the other's fears, but in the end this emotion was overcome by his curiosity. Seeing that the fat man's terror of the sword was a very real one, he lowered it and returned it to its sheath.

The fat man breathed easier then, but it was some moments before speech returned. Then when he did speak, it was only to repeat the question he had asked before.

"What are you doing here in the halls of the Esthetts?" he gulped fearfully.

Tumithak considered his answer carefully. These people, he knew, did not fear the shelk; clearly, then, they were friendly with them. The Loorian doubted the advisability of confiding in the obese craven, but at the same time it seemed absurd to fear him or any others like him. And the natural conceit that is a part of every great genius made Tumithak long to boast of his mission so that at last he decided to answer the question.

"I am on my way to the Surface," he said. "I come from the lowest pit of all, so far down that we have never even heard of the halls of the Esthetts, as you call them. Are you one of the Esthetts?"

"On your way to the Surface," said the other, who was now fast losing his fear. "But you have not been called! You will be killed at once. Think you that the Holy Shelks will permit any one to attain the Surface uncalled for?" His nose twitched scornfully. "And a wild man of the lower corridors at that!"

Tumithak was stung by the scorn in the other's voice.

"Listen, fat one," he said, "I do not ask the permission of anyone to visit the Surface. As for the shelks, my whole object in reaching the Surface is that I might kill one of them."

The other looked at him with a look that Tumithak was at a loss to

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interpret.

"You will soon die," said the Esthett, calmly. "There is no need of my fearing you any longer. Surely any one who speaks such unthinkable blasphemy is doomed even as he says it." He settled himself more comfortably in his bed as he spoke, and looked at Tumithak curiously.

"From where, oh, Wild One, did such an impossible idea come to you?" he asked.

The Loorian might have had a feeling of anger at the other's attitude, had not this question shown him a loophole for expounding his favorite subject. He began to tell the Esthett, in elaborate detail, all the story of his mission. The latter listened attentively, so interested, apparently, that Tumithak grew more and more interested in the telling.

He spoke of his early life, of the finding of the book, and the inspiration it had given him; he told of the many years of preparation for his journey, and of the many adventures he had had since he left Loor.

The fat one was strangely interested, but to Tumithak, wrapped up in the story of his mission, it never once occurred that the Esthett was sparring for time. And so, when he was finished with his story at last, he was quite willing to listen to the Chosen One's story of his own life in the marble halls.

"We who live in these halls," began the Esthett, "are those chosen ones of the race of mankind who possess the one thing that the Holy Shelks lack — the power of creating beauty. Mighty as the Masters are, they have no artistic ability, but in spite of this they are quite capable of appreciating our art, and so they have come to rely upon us for the beauties of life, and they have given it to us to produce all the great works of art that decorate their wonderful palaces on the Surface! All the great art works that you see on the walls of these corridors have been executed by me and my fellow-citizens. All the rich paintings and statuary that you will see later, in our great square, all these are the rejected specimens that the Holy Shelks have no need of. Can you imagine the beauties of the accepted pieces that have found their way up to the Surface?

"And in return for our beauty, the shelks feed us and give us every luxury imaginable. Of all mankind, we alone have been chosen as worthy of being the friends and companions of the world's masters."

He paused for a moment, breathless with what was apparently an exceptionally long speech, for him. After resting a while, he went on:

"Here in these marble corridors, we of the Esthetts are born and educated. We work only at our art: we work only when it suits us, and our work is carefully examined by the shelks, and the choicest is preserved. The artists who produce this work — listen carefully, wild man — the artists who produce this work are called from their homes

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to join the great guild of Chosen Ones who live on the Surface and spend the rest of their lives decorating the glorious palaces and gardens of the Holy Shelks! They are the happiest of men, for they know that their work is praised by the very Lords of Creation themselves."

He was panting with the effort caused by his story, but he struggled bravely on:

"Can you wonder that we feel ourselves superior to the men who have allowed themselves to become little better than animals, little more than rabbits skulking in their warrens, miles below the ground? Can you wonder that — "

His speech was suddenly cut off by a sound from the corridor without. It was the sound of a siren, whose tones grew shriller and shriller, higher and higher until it seemed to pass entirely beyond the range of sound heard by human ears. The Esthett was suddenly beside himself with eagerness. He began to struggle out of his bed, managed after several failures to get to his feet, waddled to the door and then turned.

"The Masters!" he cried. "The Holy Shelks! They have come to take another group of artists to the Surface. I knew they would be here soon, wild man, and it was not for nothing that I listened to your long, tiresome story. Try to escape if you can, but you know as well as I that none can escape from the Masters. And now I go to tell them of your presence!"

He slammed the door suddenly in Tumithak's face and was gone.

For several minutes, Tumithak remained motionless in the apartment. That shelks were so near to him seemed incredible. Yet he expected every minute to see the door open and to have the horrible spider-like creatures rush in and slay him. At last, it seemed, he was in a trap from which there was no escape. He shivered with fear, and then, as always, the very intensity of his fear shamed him and caused him to take a new grip upon himself; and though he trembled violently at what he was about to do, he moved to the door and examined it carefully. He had decided that the chances of escape would be greater in the corridor than if he waited here for the shelks to capture him. It was several minutes before he discovered the secret of the latch, but then he swung the door open and stepped into the corridor.

The corridor in Tumithak's vicinity was fortunately empty, but far up the hallway, the obese Esthett could still be seen, bustling ponderously on his way. He had been joined by others, many as fat as he; and all were hastening, as fast as their weight would let them up the corridor, in the direction in which the square of the city evidently lay. Tumithak followed them at a discreet distance, and after a while, saw them turn into another corridor. He approached the corridor cautiously, the

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determination forming in his mind to slay the fat one that intended to betray him at the first opportunity. It was well that he used care in his approach, for when he peered around the corner he saw that he was not a hundred feet from the town's great square.

He had never seen such a great square. It was a huge hall over a hundred yards in diameter, its tesselated marble floor and carved walls presenting an appearance that made Tumithak gasp in wonder. Here and there statues stood on vari-colored pedestals, and all the doorways were hung with beautiful tapestries. The entire square was almost filled with Esthetts, over five hundred being present.

Not the hall, its furnishings nor its inhabitants had much effect on Tumithak. His eyes were occupied in observing the great cylinder of metal that lay in the center of the hall. It was just such a cylinder as the one he had seen on the carving when he first entered the city — eighteen or twenty feet long, mounted on four thickly tired wheels and having, he now perceived a round opening in the top.

While he looked, a number of objects shot out of the opening and dropped lightly before the crowd. One after another, just as jacks from a box, they leapt from the opening, and as they nimbly struck the ground the Esthetts raised a cheer. Tumithak drew hastily back, and then, his curiosity overcoming his caution, dared to peep again into the hall. For the first time in over a hundred years, a man of Loor gazed upon a shelk!

Standing about four feet high, they were indeed spider-like, just as tradition said. But a close look showed that this was only a superficial resemblance. For these creatures were hairless, and possessed ten legs, rather than the eight that belong to a true spider. The legs were long and triple jointed and on the tip of each was a short rudimentary claw much like a finger nail. There were two bunches of these legs, five on each side, and they joined the creature at a point midway between the head and the body. The body was shaped much like the abdomen of a wasp, and was about the same size as the head, which was certainly the strangest part of the entire creature.

For the head was the head of a man: The same eyes, the same broad brow, a mouth with tight, thin lips, and a chin — all these gave the head of the creature a startling resemblance to that of a man. The nose and hair alone were missing, to make the face perfectly human.

As Tumithak looked, they entered at once upon the business that had brought them down into the corridor. One of them took a paper from a pouch strapped to his body, grasping it nimbly between two of his limbs, and began to speak. His voice had a queer, metallic clack about it, but it was not a bit hard for Tumithak to distinguish every word he said.

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"Brothers of the Pits," he cried, "the time has come for another group of you to make your homes on the Surface! The friends who left you last week are eagerly awaiting your arrival there, and it only remains for us to call the names of the ones to whom the great honor has fallen. Listen carefully, and let each one enter the cylinder as his name is called."

He paused, allowing his words to sink in, and then in a silence that was impressive, he began to call the names.

"Korystalis! Vintiamia! Lathrumidor! he called, and one after another, great, bull-bodied men strutted forward and climbed up a small ladder that was lowered from the cylinder. The third man called, Tumithak noticed, was the one who had conversed with him in the apartment. The look on his face, as well as on the faces of the others, was one of surprise and joy, as if some incredible piece of good luck had befallen him.

Now Tumithak had been so absorbed in observing the shelks and their vehicle that he had forgotten momentarily the threat that the Esthett had made, but when he saw him approaching the shelks, the Loorian's terror returned. He stood, rooted in his tracks with fear. But his fear was unnecessary, for apparently this unexpected piece of good fortune had driven everything else from the simple mind of the Chosen One, for he climbed into the cylinder without so much as a word to the shelks standing about. And Tumithak gave a great sigh of relief as he disappeared into the hole.

There were six shelks, and six Esthett's names were called; and as fast as they were called, their owners stepped forward and clambered, puffing and grunting, into the car. At last, the sixth had struggled down into the round opening and the shelks turned and followed. A lid covered the hole from below, and silence reigned in the hall. After a moment, the Esthetts began to drift away, and as several moved toward the corridor in which Tumithak was concealed, he was forced to dart back through the passage some distance and slip into an apartment to avoid discovery.

He half expected some Esthett to enter the apartment and discover him, but this time luck was with him and after a few moments, he peered cautiously through the door to find the corridor empty. He emerged and quickly made his way to the main hall. It was deserted of Esthetts, now, but for some reason the cylinder still remained in the same spot; and Tumithak was suddenly seized with an idea that made him tremble with its magnitude.

These shelks had obviously come from the Surface in this car! And now they were going back to the Surface in it. Had not the Esthett, whom the shelks named Lathrumidor, told him that occasionally artists

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were called to live upon the Surface among the shelks? Yes, this car was certainly going to return to the Surface. And, with a sudden rush of inspired determination, Tumithak knew that he was going with it.

He hastened forward and in a moment was clinging to the rear of the machine, clambering for a foothold on the few projections he could find. He was not a moment too soon, for hardly had he gotten a firm grip on the machine than it leaped silently forward and sped at a vertiginous speed up the corridor!

Tumithak's memory of that ride was a wild kaleidoscopic jumble of incidents. So fast did the car speed, that it was only occasionally, as they slowed to turn a corner or passed through an exceptionally narrow hall, that he could lift his eyes and look about him.

They passed through halls more brilliantly lighted than any he had yet seen. He saw halls of metal, polished and gleaming, and corridors of unpolished rock where the vibration of passing over rough rock threatened to hurl him at any moment from his precarious position.

Once they passed slowly through a marble passageway where Esthett's were lined on either side, chanting a solemn and sonorous hymn as the car of the shelks passed through. Tumithak was certain that he would be discovered, but if any of the singers saw him they paid little heed, evidently believing him to be a captive of the shelks. There were no longer any pits or branching hallways now, the entire road to the surface was one broad main corridor and along this corridor the car sped, carrying Tumithak ever nearer to his goal.

Although the car's speed was not great as measured by the speed of the cars we use today, it must be remembered that the fastest speed the Loorian had ever conceived was a fast run. So it seemed to him now that he rode upon the very wings of the wind, and his thankfulness knew no bounds when the car at last slowed to a speed that enabled him to drop to the ground in a section of the corridor that had apparently been uninhabited for many years. All thought of continuing the ride was abandoned now, his only desire was to end the devil's ride that he had so foolhardily undertaken.

For a moment, Tumithak was inclined to lie where he had fallen, at least long enough to regain control of his dazed faculties, but the sudden realization that the car of the shelks had stopped, not a hundred yards away, brought him instantly to his feet, and he flung himself hurriedly through the nearest open door. The apartment in which he found himself was dustladen and bare of furniture; it was obvious that it had been long unused, and so, convinced that no danger awaited him there, Tumithak returned to the door and looked out at the car.

He saw at once that the queer door or hatchway in the top of the car

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was open, but it was several moments before the occupants began to emerge. Then the fat head of one of the Esthetts appeared and its owner laboriously dragged himself up an over the side of the car. He was followed by a shelk, who leaped nimbly to the ground, after which the car slowly emptied until all twelve of its occupants were in the corridor. They all turned, then, and entered an apartment, the only one visible that bore a curtain over the door.

For a while, Tumithak remained in his hiding place debating his next move. His instinctive timidity urged him to remain in hiding, to wait — for days, if necessary — until the shelks had re-entered the car and departed. His curiosity demanded that he attempt to discover what the strangely allied party was doing beyond that great tapestry-covered door. And his wisdom told him that if he intended to continue on his quest, the best course was to keep on at once up the corridor, while the shelks were still within the apartment — for he knew that he was but a few short miles from the surface, toward which he had been traveling for so long.

His better judgment conquered at last and he chose the latter course, determined to forget the party, and so emerged from the room and began to run lightly and silently on his way; but as he passed the great doorway and saw how easily one might conceal himself in them, he determined to have one last look at the shelks and their strange friends before continuing. So, suiting the action to the thought, he stepped to the opening and, drawing the curtains around him, parted them slightly and looked into the room.

The first thing to strike his attention was the immense size of the room. It must have been eighty feet long and half as many wide, truly an enormous room to the Loorian; and its ceiling was lost in gloom. So high was it that the lights which were arranged around the room at the level of the shoulder, were not bright enough to show any of its detail. Tumithak had a queer idea that there was no ceiling, that perhaps the walls rose higher and higher until at last they reached the Surface. He had little time to speculate on this possibility, however, for he had hardly noticed it when his eyes fell upon the table. A great low table, it was, a long table covered with a cloth of snowy whiteness and piled high with strange articles that Tumithak saw were intended to be foods. But the Loorian looked at them in wonder, for they were foods such as he had never before heard of, such as his ancestors had not known for many a generation, the thousand and one succulent viands of the Surface. And around the table were a dozen low divans, and on some of these divans the Esthetts were even now reclining, greedily partaking of the varied foods.

The shelks, strangely enough were not joining them in the feast.

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Behind each of the ponderous artists, a shelk had taken his place, and to Tumithak's notion, there was something ominous in the way they stood, silently watching every move the Esthetts made. But the self-styled Chosen Ones were quite at ease, gobbling their food and grunting appreciation interjections to each other, until Tumithak turned from looking at them in disgust.

And then, suddenly, there came a sharp command from the shelk at the head of the table. The Esthetts looked up in consternation and dismay, a pitiable incredulity in their faces. Before they could move, however, before they could even cry out, on each a shelk had leaped, his thin-lipped mouth seeking, finding unerringly, the jugular vein beneath the folds of flesh in the fat one's heavy throat.

Vainly the artists struggled, their slow, helpless movements were unavailing, the nimble shelks easily avoiding their groping arms while all the time their teeth sank deeper into the flesh. Tumithak gasped in horror. As one in a trance, he watched the movements of the Esthetts become feebler until at last all motion ceased. The Loorian's brain was in a daze. What — what on Venus could be the meaning of this? What connection could this grisly scene have with the lengthy explanation of the lives of these people that Lathrumidor had given him in the marble halls below? He gazed at the scene in horror, unable to move his eyes.

The Esthetts were quiet now, and the shelks had raised themselves from them and were busy with some new occupation. From beneath the table they had drawn several large, transparent jars and half a dozen small machines with long hoses attached. These hoses were fastened to the wounds in the necks of the Esthetts and as Tumithak looked on he saw the blood swiftly pumped from the bodies and ejected into the jars.

As the jars filled with the liquid, the bodies of the Esthetts collapsed like punctured balloons, and in a few moments they lay, pallid and wrinkled, on the floor about the table. The shelks showed no excitement in their work; apparently it was merely a routine duty with them, and their calm business-like methods served only to add to Tumithak's terror; but at last he overcame the paralytic fear that held him, and he turned and sped frantically away. Up the corridor he ran faster and faster, farther and farther, and at last, spent and breathless, unable to run another step, he darted into an open door and flung himself gasping and panting on the floor of the apartment it led into.

Slowly he regained control of himself, his breath returned, and with it some small measure of confidence. He berated himself harshly for his cowardice, and yet, even as he did so, he trembled at the thought of the terrible sight that he had witnessed. As he grew calmer, he began to wonder at the meaning of the events that he had seen. Lathrumidor,

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the Esthett, had led him to believe that the shelks were the kindly masters of the immense artists. He had spoken of the journey to the Surface as being the culminating honor of an Esthett's life. The shelk who had spoken in the great hall, too, had intimated as much. Yet for some strange reason, at the first opportunity after leaving the city, the shelks had slain their worshiping servants, and slain them in a way that seemed quite usual and commonplace to them. Strive as he might, Tumithak could not account for this apparent anomaly. And so, cowering in the rear room of the apartment, puzzling over the unnaturalness of the day's adventures, the Loorian fell into a troubled sleep.

It is not to be wondered that Tumithak was puzzled at the strange events of the day. He knew of no relationship between animals, such as existed between the Esthetts and the shelks. There were no domestic animals in the pits and man had not known of them for centuries. Other centuries were to go by before they were to know of them again, so there was nothing in Tumithak's life analogous to the status in which the shelks held the Esthetts.

Today we know that they were — cattle! Lulled into a sense of false security by hypocritical lies, bred for centuries for the full-blooded, bovine stupidity that was characteristic of them, allowed no means of intellectual expression except the artistic impulse which the shelks scorned, they had become, after many generations, the willing creatures of the Beasts of Venus.

And by a strange combination of the lies of the shelks and their own immense conceit, they had come to look forward, from earliest childhood, to that happy day when they would be taken to the Surface — to become, unknowingly, the food of their masters. Such were the Esthetts, strangest, perhaps, of all the various races of men evolved by the breeding of the shelks.

All this, however, was far beyond the comprehension of Tumithak — or of any man of his generation. And so it was that even after he awoke and resumed his journey, he was still unable to account for the strange relationship. But the puzzles which a semi-savage mind cannot solve, it soon forgets, and so it was that before long Tumithak was strolling along on his way, his mind entirely at ease.

Since passing the hall of the singing Esthetts, during his wild ride, Tumithak had seen no signs of habitation. Apparently the corridors were entirely too near the surface to be inhabited by man. So Tumithak saw no one in the corridors and traveled for several miles undisturbed. At last he came to an abrupt end of the passage, and here found a ladder of metal set into the wall that rose higher and higher in the gloom. Filled with a suppressed excitement, his heart beating noticeably again, Tumithak began the ascent of what he knew to be the last pit

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before he reached the surface. He emerged from it in a hall of strange black stone, and removing from his pouch the last of his father's gifts, he started along the upward slope, the weapon held gingerly in his hand. The corridor was narrower than any Tumithak had ever seen, and as he walked along the walls drew still closer together, until it was not more than two feet wide. The grade became steeper and steeper and at last became a flight of stairs. Up these Tumithak strode, every moment his heart beating wilder, and at last he saw what he knew to be his goal. Far ahead, a light shone down in the corridor from above, a light far brighter and harsher than any of the lights of the corridors, and of a strange reddish tint. Tumithak knew, as he looked on it in awe, that the light was the light of the Surface.

He hurried forward; the ceiling became lower and lower and for the last few yards, he was forced to stoop, and then, finally, he reached the top of the steps and found himself standing in a shallow pit, not more than five feet deep. He raised his head and a low gasp of absolute disbelief escaped from him.

For Tumithak had looked upon the Surface . . .

The vastness of the scene was enough to unnerve the Loorian. It seemed that he had emerged into a mighty room or hall, so tremendous that he could not even comprehend its immensity. The ceiling and walls of this room merged into each other to form a stupendous vault like an inverted bowl, which touched the floor of the vault at a distance so far away that it seemed utterly incredible. And this ceiling and these walls in places were of a beautiful blue, the color of a woman's eyes. This blue glowed like a jewel, and was mottled with great billowy areas of white and rose, and as Tumithak looked he had a vague feeling that those enormous billowy spots were slowly moving and changing in shape.

Unable to take his eyes from the sky above him, Tumithak's wonder and awe began to turn into a great fear. The more he looked, the further away the great dome seemed to be, and yet, curiously and terribly, it seemed to be closing in on him, too. He was sure, after a moment, that the great billowy spots were moving, and he had a dreadful feeling that they were about to fall and crush him. Sick and terrified at the enormity of the scene before him, he darted back into the passageway and cowered against the wall, trembling with a strange, unreasoning fear. For, raised as he had been in the close confines of the corridor walls, living his whole life under the ground, Tumithak, when he first looked upon the Surface, became a victim of agoraphobia, that strange fear of open spaces, that in some people, even today, amounts to a disease.

It was nearly an hour before his reason was able to gain control over this strange fear. Had he come this far, he argued with himself, only to return because of the appearance of the Surface? Surely, if that mighty

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blue and cloudy vault was to fall, it would not have waited all these years just to fall on him. He took a deep breath, and reason prevailing at last, he again looked out upon the Surface.

But this time his eyes avoided the sky, and he directed his attention to the floor of the "room." In the vicinity of the pit this floor consisted of a thick brown dust, but not far away this dust was covered with a strange carpet consisting of thousands of long green hairs thickly matted together, completely hiding the dusty floor beneath. In the middle distance were a number of tall, irregular pillars whose tops were covered with a great huge bunch of green stuff, of the same color and appearance as the hairs of the carpet.

And then, as Tumithak looked beyond the grass and the trees, he beheld a wonder that surpassed the other wonders that he had seen, for hanging low in the dome above the trees was the light of the Surface, a brilliant, blinding orb that lit up, redly, all that vast space of the Surface.

Speechless with awe, Tumithak looked upon the sunset. Again came the dizzy, sickening rush of agoraphobia, but with it came a sense of beauty that made him forget his fear, and gradually calmed him. After a while he turned his eyes and looked in the opposite direction; and there, towering high above him were the homes of the shelks!

A dozen of the high towers were visible ; obelisk-like they stood there, their metal walls gleaming redly in the light of the sinking sun. Very few of them stood perfectly erect, the strange, unearthly, artistic sense of the shelks causing them to be built at various angles from the perpendicular, some as much as thirty degrees. They were of varying heights; some fifty, some as much as two hundred feet high, and from their tops long cables hung, linking all the towers together. Windowless they were, and the only mode of entry was a small, round door at the bottom. Not one of all these towers was more than fifteen feet in circumference, so that they gave an appearance not unlike a bundle of huge needles.

For how long the Loorian gazed at these amazing scenes, he could not tell. Of all the wondrous sights, the strangest, to him, was the sunset, the gradual sinking of the great red light into what seemed to be the floor of the vast chamber. Even after the sun had disappeared, he remained gazing at the walls, which still glowed redly where it had been . . . And then —

Tumithak had not heard a sound. Lost in wonder though he was, his ears had remained instinctively on the alert, and yet he had heard nothing. Until suddenly there was a scratching, rustling noise behind him and a clattering, metallic voice barked staccato words of command.

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"Get — back — in — that — hole!" it spat, and Tumithak's blood turned to water as he realized that a shelk had stolen up behind him!

The next second seemed a year to the Loorian. He turned to face the beast, and in that turning a thousand thoughts raced through his mind. He thought of Nikadur and Thupra, and of the many years that he had known them; he thought of his father and even of his little remembered mother; he thought, strangely enough of the huge Yakran that he had tumbled into the pit and of how he had bellowed as he fell. All these thoughts rushed through his mind as he turned and his arm flew up to protect him. Utterly instinctive, the action was; it seemed that he was not in control of his body at all. Something outside of him — greater than himself — caused him to flex his fingers, and as he did, the revolver, the last of his father's three strange gifts spat flame and thunder! As in a dream, he heard its spitting bark, once, twice, thrice — seven times; and into the shallow pit tumbled the dead body of the shelk!

For a moment, the hero stared at it dumbly. Then, as the realization that he had accomplished his mission came over him a great feeling of exultation seized him. Quickly drawing his sword, he began to slash at the ten long finger-like legs of the shelk, humming, as he did so, the song that the Loorians sang when they marched against the Yakrans; and though there were strange, questioning clacks and clatters from the direction of the homes of the shelks, he methodically continued hacking until the head was free from the body.

Then, realizing that the voices of the shelks were much nearer, he stuffed the bleeding head into the bosom of his tunic, and sped like the wind down the steps of the corridor.

Tumlook of Loor, the father of Tumithak, sat in the doorway of his apartment, gazing out into the corridor. It was a lonely life that he had led for the past few weeks, for although his friends had tried to cheer him with the customary optimistic chatter, he could see that they all believed that his son would never return. And indeed, it would have been a bold man that would argue that Tumithak had even so much as passed the city of Yakra.

Tumlook knew the opinions of his friends and he was beginning to believe as they did, in spite of the fact that they did their best to make him think that they expected wondrous things of his son. Why, he wondered, had he ever let the youth depart on such a hopeless quest? Why had he not been more stern with him, and driven the idea out of his head while he was still young? So he sat and berated himself, in this hour just before the time of sleep, as the life of Loor passed by him in an

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irregular, intermittent stream.

After a while his face brightened a little. Coming down the hall toward him were the two lovers whose long friendship with Tumithak had made a bond that Tumlook felt he had somehow inherited. Nikadur hailed him, and as they drew near, Thupra ran up and kissed him impulsively on the cheek.

"Have you heard anything of Tumithak?" she cried, the question that had been almost a form of greeting between them.

Tumlook shook his head.

"Is it likely?" he asked. "Surely after all these weeks, we must look upon him as dead."

But Thupra was not to be discouraged. Indeed, of all Loor, it was probably she alone who maintained the confidence that Tumithak was safe and would return in triumph.

"I think he will return," she said now. "You know, we are sure that he reached Yakra. And has not Nennapuss told us of the huge giant that was found dead at the foot of the Yakran shaft? If Tumithak could conquer such a man as that, who could overcome him?"

"Thupra may be right," said Nikadur, gravely. "There are rumors in Nonone of a great panic in Yakra, during which a man of these corridors is supposed to have passed through the town. The rumors are vague and may be only gossip, but perhaps Tumithak did reach the dark corridors."

"Tumithak will return, I know," Thupra repeated. "He is mighty, and — " she paused. Far up the corridor, her ears caught a sound and she listened questioningly. Then Nikadur heard it, too, and last of all it reached the ears of Tumlook.

A shouting, a distant shouting that grew louder even as they listened. Several passing pedestrians heard it, too, and paused; and then two men turned and hastened off in its direction. The trio strained their ears to distinguish the meaning of the cries. Several more men came speeding up the corridor, running in the direction of the noise.

"Come," cried Nikadur suddenly, consternation written on his face. "If this is a raid of the Yakrans — " In spite of the cries of Thupra, he sped off, and Tumlook hesitated only long enough to dart back into his apartment and arm himself before he followed.

Thupra, however, was not to be left behind. She caught up with Nikadur in a moment, and in spite of his protestations, persisted in going with him. And so the three, joined soon by many others, rushed on in the direction of the excitement.

A man passed them, running the other way. "What is it?" came a chorus of a dozen voices, but the man's only answer was an unintelligible gabble of words as he ran on. The crowd's ignorance was not to

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continue for long, though, for at the very next turn of the corridor, they beheld the cause of the tumult.

Down the corridor came marching an incredible procession. A group of Loorians led the parade, dancing and cheering like mad, while behind them came marching a well-known figure — Nennapuss, chief of Nononese, with his retinue of officers. Nennapuss was followed by what must have been almost the entire population of Nonone, all gabbling and shouting madly to the Loorians whom they passed. It was not at the Nononese that the Loorians stared, however, but at the ones who followed them. Behind Nennapuss' men came a crowd of Yakrans, each carrying aloft a white cloth on a stick that still, after so many hundreds of years denoted a truce. Datto was there, the burly chief of the Yakrans, and his huge nephew, Tropf, and many others of whom the Loorians had heard of from the Nononese, and there, high on the shoulders of two of the mightiest Yakrans, was riding — Tumithak!

But when the eyes of the Loorians looked upon Tumithak, they looked no further. For the sight they beheld was so incredible that it seemed impossible to believe that they were not dreaming.

He was dressed in garments that, to their eyes, were beautiful beyond telling. There were of the finest texture imaginable, sheer

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gauzes that were dyed in the most delicate shades of nacreous pinks and greens and blues. They flowed down over his form, clinging to his body and giving him all the appearance of a god. Around his head was a metal band not unlike a crown, such a band as legend said the king shelks were wont to wear.

And, most unbelievable of all, he held his arm aloft, and in his hand was the wrinkled head of a shelk!

Tumlook, Nikadur and Thupra never knew when they joined the crowd. One moment they were rushing down the corridor toward the incredible procession, the next, it had absorbed them and they, too, were a part of the howling, enthusiastic mob that fought and laughed its way toward the great square of Loor.

They reached the crossing of the two main corridors and formed an immense crowd with Tumithak and the Yakrans in its center. The crowd continued its chattering and cheering for some moments and then Tumithak, mounting the stone pedestal that had long been used for speakers, held up his hand for silence. Quiet reigned almost instantly, and in the lull, the voice of Nennapuss, that instinctive master of ceremonies, could be heard.

"Friends of Loor," he cried. "Today is the day that will live forever in the archives of the three cities of the lower corridors. It has been unnumbered years since the three cities have all met on a friendly footing, and to bring that about it has taken an event so incredible that it is well-nigh impossible to believe. For at last a man has slain a shelk — "

He was interrupted by the booming voice of Datto, the much-decorated chief of the Yakrans.

"Enough of this talk," he shouted. "We are here to do honor to Tumithak, the Loorian, who has slain a shelk. Let us shout and sing songs in his praise. Let us bow to him, Nennapuss, we who are chiefs, let us call upon the chiefs of Loor to bow to him also, for who could slay a shelk if he were not far greater than we."

Nennapuss looked a little nettled at having been interrupted at his favorite pastime, but before he could answer, Tumithak began to speak. And at his word, Yakran and Nononese alike listened with respect.

"Fellow Loorians," he began. "Brothers of Nonone and Yakra, it was not for honor that I journeyed to the Surface and slew the beast whose head I hold in my hand. Since I was a boy I have felt that men could fight against the shelks. It has been the ambition of my life to prove that fact to everyone. Surely no citizen of Loor was less of a fighter than I. Many, indeed, have scorned me for a mere dreamer of dreams. And I assure you that I was little more. Can you not see that man is not the weak, insignificant creature that you seem to think? You Yakrans have never

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cowered in fear when the men of Loor came against you! Loorians, have you ever trembled in your apartments when the Yakrans raided your halls?

"Yet the cry of 'Shelk!' will send you all fleeing panic-stricken to your homes! Can you not see that these shelks, although mighty, are only mortal creatures like yourselves? Listen to the story of my deeds, now, and see if I have done anything you could not have done.

He took up the recital of his adventures. He told of the passing of Yakra, and though the Loorians cheered a bit there was silence among the people of Yakra, and then he told of the dark corridors, and the Yakrans, too, cheered as he recited his story of the slaying of the dogs. He told of the halls of the Esthetts, and in glowing colors described to them the beauties there, hoping that he might arouse in them the desire to possess these beauties.

And then he tried to tell them of the Surface, but here words failed him; it was hardly possible, in the limited vocabulary of the corridors, to tell of the slaying of the shelk, and at last the story of his return.

"For some reason the shelks did not follow me," he said, "and I reached the first halls of the Esthetts in safety. And here I was discovered, and had to fight a battle with a half dozen of the fat ones before I could go farther. I slew them all," Tumithak, in that sublime, unconscious conceit of his, failed to say how easy it had been to slaughter his huge opponents, "and taking from them these garments, continued on my way.

"I came again to the dark corridors, but even here no one opposed me. Perhaps the terrible smell of shelk was so great that the savages feared to come near me. So at last I came to Yakra, and found that the woman whom I had met on my upward journey had told her story to Datto, the chief, who was ready and eager to do me honor on my return home. And so I came to Nonone, and after a time to Loor.

He ceased his story, and again the crowd broke into cheers. The cheers increased, echoed back against the walls until the great hall rang like a bell. "Great is Tumithak of the Loorians!" They cried; "Great is Tumithak, slayer of shelks!" And Tumithak folded his arms and drank in the praise, forgetful for the moment that his entire mission had been to prove that it did not take a great man to kill a shelk.

After a while, the tumult began to die and the voice of Datto was heard again.

"Loorians," he shouted. "For many, many years, the men of Yakra have fought unending war with the men of Loor. Today that war ceases. Today we have found a Loorian who is greater than all Yakrans, and so we fight with Loor no more. And to prove that I speak truth, Datto bows in allegiance to Tumithak!"

Again the cheers, and at last Nennapuss arose.

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"It is a good thing that you have done, O Datto," he said, "and truly Tumithak is a chief of chiefs if there ever was one. Nennapuss, too, bows to Tumithak, chief of chiefs and chief of Nonone."

Again there was a great demonstration and after a while, Datto began to speak again. Would it not be a seemly thing, he asked frowning fiercely, for the Loorians to recognize Tumithak as their chief also, thus making him king of all the lower corridors? The Loorians raised a cheer, and then Tagivos, the eldest of the doctors, arose to speak.

"The people of Loor have government somewhat different from that of Nonone and Yakra," he said. "We have not had a chief for many years. However, it might be a good thing for the three towns to b united and so I will call a meeting of the council to decide on it."

The council was soon grouped together; Tagivos, Tumlook and old Sidango leading them, and after a while they announced that they were agreed to recognize Tumithak as their chief also. And so, amid wild cheering, that made it utterly impossible to distinquish a word that was said, Tumithak became chief of all the lower corridors.

"Friends of lower corridors," he said. "A new day dawns for man today. It has been over thirty years since war has visited these corridors and in all those years men have almost forgotten the arts of war. We have lived in a spirit of slothful peace, while above us the enemies of all mankind have grown stronger and stronger. But in making me your chief, you have ended that era of peace and brought upon yourselves new lives of action. I will not be a peaceful ruler, for I, who have seen so much of the world, will not be content to skulk idly in the deepest corridor. Already I plan to lead you against the savages of the dark corridors, to claim those halls as our own, and to fill them with the lights that still gleam in the deserted corridors that we no longer use.

"And if we conquer those savages, I shall take you against the huge Esthetts to show you what beauty can do for the life of man. And the time will surely come, if the High One be willing, when I shall lead you against the shelks themselves, for what I have done, every one of you can do, and shall do.

"And if anyone feels that the task I call upon you to do is too great, let him speak now for I will not rule over man against his will."

Again the cheers broke out, and gathered volume, and rang from wall to wall of the great square. In the excitement and enthusiasm of the moment, there was not a man in all the crowd that did not feel that he, too, might become a slayer of shelks.

And while they cheered and sang, and worked themselves into a frenzy, Tumithak stepped down from the stone and strode off in the direction of his home.

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Between the Lines

An analysis of "Tumithak of the Corridors"

by Robert Wilcox

ONE OF THE fundamental appeals of science fiction is the search, or quest, which runs through most stories. Our hero has set out to find something. It may be a magical substance, or an irresistible weapon, or a beautiful woman who has been hidden away somewhere by a foul villain. To gain his objective our major character must overcome a series of frustrations or obstacles, all of which complicate the plot and increase the readers' suspense. We continue to turn the pages to find out how the hero will meet his various challenges, and what new perils face him after each conquest. We join him, then, in his quest for whatever the goal, and it is this identification with his struggles which keeps the story moving and forbids our putting it down until the finish.

This is the process that has worked effectively in our reading of myths and fairy tales, early in our childhood. Would Hercules successfully complete the twelve labors assigned him by Eurystheus which would qualify him for immortality? Could Ulysses fight his way back to Ithaca and to Penelope? We wished with all our childish might that these heroes would triumph and gain their prizes.

In Tumithak we find the sort of fellow we can cheer for. Here is a restless adventurer, not content to loaf in the relative security of his familiar corridors. His yearning to escape to the surface, to seek the head of one of the mythical creatures which have condemned his people to live in the bowels of the planet, is a cause we can understand. We see that he is different from all the young folk about him. His curiosity is insatiable, fired by his father's encouragement to a fever pitch which cannot be ignored. He pores over

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ancient maps of the corridors, soaks up fact and fancy about neighboring kingdoms of the underworld and then, like a youthful Dante, gropes to Earth's surface to collect his grisly prize. He has courage, yes, but he is also armed with three special tools of the distant past which help him to overcome unusual obstacles.

These are the ingredients for a dandy adventure yarn, of course, but notice that what keeps our attention is Tumithak's goal. Without his determination to bring back that trophy, the story could easily be described as a series of random experiences. He might simply have stayed with the people of Nonone, for example, and the woman he rescued from the stampede in Yakra seemed sufficiently attracted by his young masculinity to create an interesting complication at this point. But it was that head which drove Tumithak onward, even through those hideous unlighted regions which should have sent him whimpering back to father.

The head also is important for another reason. It is a symbol. Most of us attach great importance to symbols: a grade in school, a wedding ring, a car. Symbolism in literature is a code to meaning. With a special term, such as a shelk head, a writer can get across a flood of significance. The head is obviously a prize, an evidence of success, when Tumithak brings it back to his people. But beyond this, the head stands for the center of intelligence of the shelks; it is the directing and guiding force behind their dominance of Earth. The capture of a single head, then, carries the possible hope for overthrow of the beings which control the planet's surface — a kind of key to the release of the people from their underground prison.

This prison, the network of corridors, echoes with important symbolism, as well. A corridor, or tunnel, may stand for a limitation, as with "tunnel vision." As long as these people cower in their holes they can never develop the perspective on which to build. They are like mice or moles, constantly in fear. But once they emerge from these passages into the light of the sun, the wider scope of the outside will encourage them to expand their potential and to regain ownership of their planet.

Their location, down under the surface, conveys the notion of inferiority. They are simply lower creatures, condemned to spend their existence in a sort of hell. All the classical descriptions of Hell locate it beneath the earth, so that Tumithak's struggles to elevate himself and his people to the surface may be seen as a kind of resurrection, a redemption from the torture the human race has undergone for centuries. Even within the tangle of pas-

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sageways we can find a relative contrast between heaven and hell, for there are unlighted stretches where lurk a baser form of human. The darkness has stripped from them the power of sight, so that these "men" depend on an even lower form of life — their hounds — for their clues to survival.

So we can see that the world of the corridors has its symbolic importance in the story. If the people wish, they can continue to survive for a few more years in the artificial light, eating prison fare which has been converted from surrounding rock. They can wait until the light fails and the food machines run out of power, and then they will sink to the lower level of existence enjoyed by the pitiful beings of the darkened corridors. Or they can follow their savior into the light of the upper world, where they may once again assume the direction of their destiny.

Finally, we can appreciate the great value of setting in this story. As we journey with Tumithak we observe how the quality of life varies with surroundings. His tribe of Loor felt relatively secure in its deep corridors. No shelks can get them there. In fact, the Terror has assumed the qualities of myth in these undisturbed depths. But a little closer to the surface, in the world of the Yakrans, folk are more hostile, even vicious. Their setting is one where the enemy has sometimes intruded, and the corridors immediately beyond Yakra are dark — even more to be feared than a visible enemy. It is understandable, then, that the Yakrans are suspicious, quarrelsome, easily aroused to panic. Their setting is one that makes them that way. And then we pass through the dark corridors, with their bestial inhabitants, to the realm of the Esthetts. Here the surroundings are grand and impressive; all the comforts are supplied to these unsuspecting "cattle," who enjoy life before they are carried away to be milked of their life's blood.

There are other ingredients to this yarn, of course, but these three elements make it highly enjoyable reading. The quest gives the story a goal, symbolism colors it with a wide spectrum of meaning, and the setting — well, the setting makes us happy and relieved that we can share in this adventure from the relative security of an easy chair. Our chief fear may be that the refrigerator may read "empty" before we reach the end of our journey.

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INTO THE VALLEY OF DOOM

Continued from back cover

Vile creatures of slime and matted hair
reached jagged claws into the air.
But my blade was swift and laid them bare
to rot in the Valley of Doom.

Shadowy bats swung into my sight
with armored hand I crushed out their light.
I prayed unto God to help me this night
He heard not through the Evil of Doom.

Then at long last I spied a lone soul
bent over a chest with both his hands full.
'Twas the gold and the riches with stories untold
that made up the stained dowery of Doom.

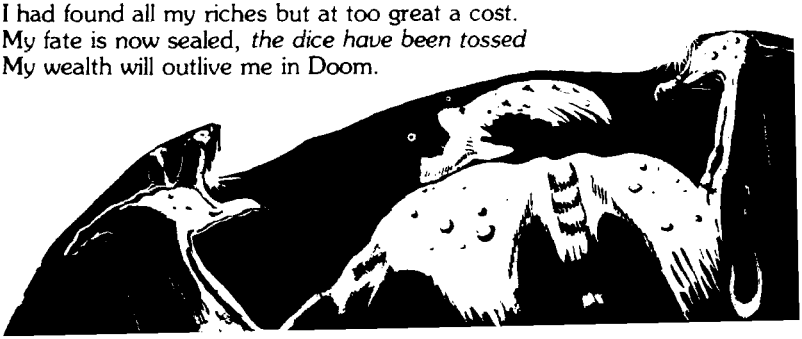
I spurred on my steed and watched as he fled
the wealth that he stole weighted like lead.
My weapon flashed once and down fell his head
so I won all the riches of Doom.

The triumph is mine! I shouted on high
then came the thunder far off in the sky.
A dazzling light fast blinded my eye
'Twas the demon that dwelled in Doom.

Fool! boomed a voice, you think you have won
I'll show you your trials have only begun.
This light that shines now will blind like the sun
and forever you'll wander in Doom.

'Twas true in an instant the omen it spoke
for my eyes reeled with fire like an iron had poked.
Through thicket and bog I clawed and I groped
to escape the damned Valley of Doom.

Now my body grows crippled, all hope is now lost
I had found all my riches but at too great a cost.
My fate is now sealed, *the dice have been tossed*
My wealth will outlive me in Doom.



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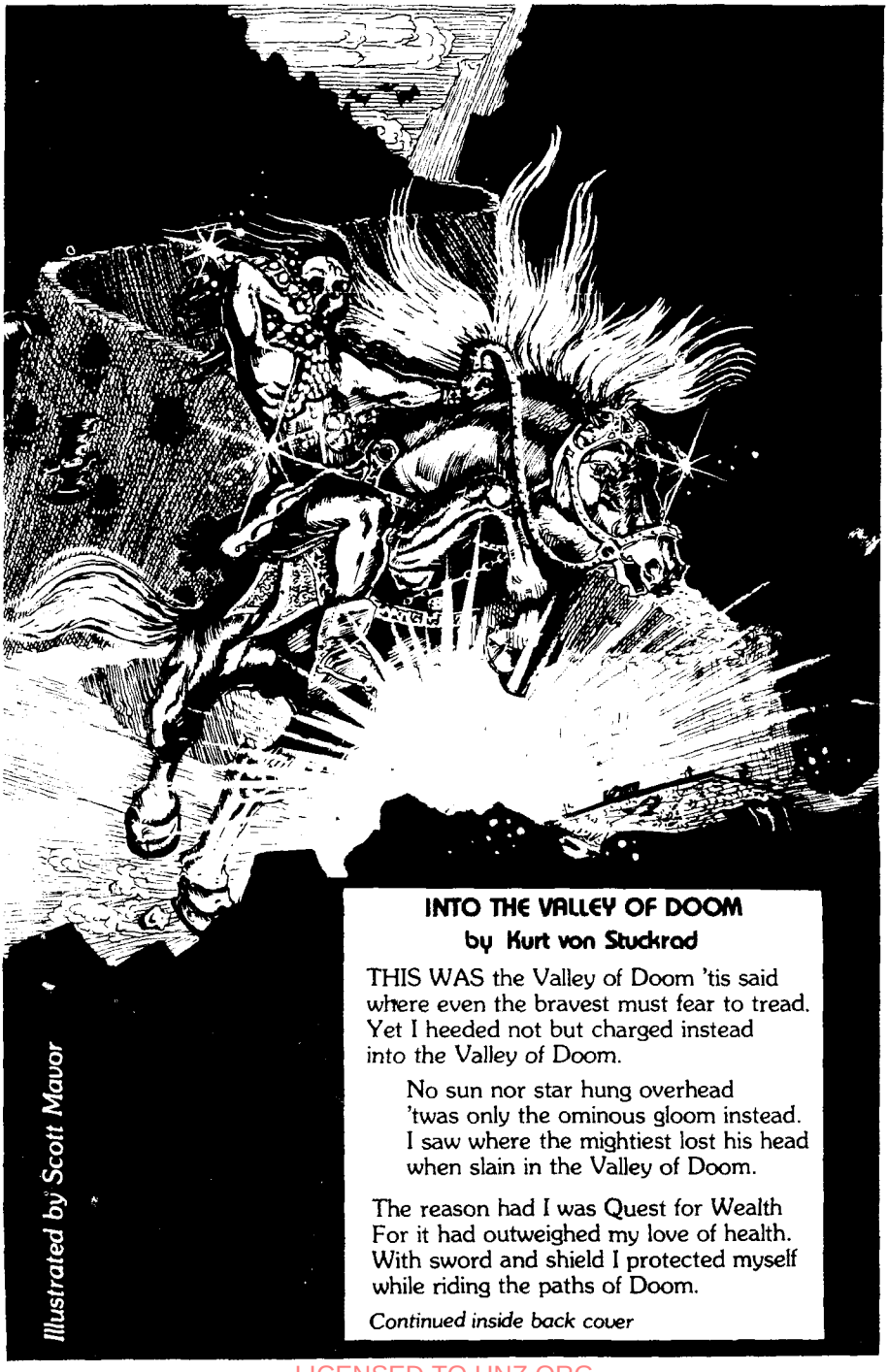

Illustrated by Scott Mavor

INTO THE VALLEY OF DOOM

by Kurt von Stuckrad

THIS WAS the Valley of Doom 'tis said
where even the bravest must fear to tread.
Yet I heeded not but charged instead
into the Valley of Doom.

No sun nor star hung overhead
'twas only the ominous gloom instead.
I saw where the mightiest lost his head
when slain in the Valley of Doom.

The reason had I was Quest for Wealth
For it had outweighed my love of health.
With sword and shield I protected myself
while riding the paths of Doom.

Continued inside back cover

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